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Chai for change?

Stories of Adivasi indigeneities, self-reliance, and activism

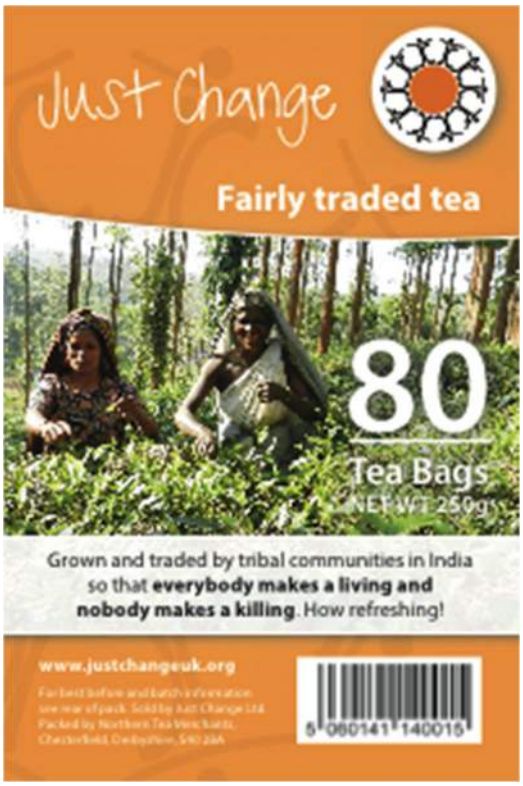

Photo: Just Change UK

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Submitted for

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Durham University

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Claudia Caterina Aufschnaiter 2015

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Abstract

Chai for change? is a story about stories. More precisely, stories of Adivasi self-reliance through tea, Adivasi indigeneities, and Adivasi activism.

At the outset of this study of narratives of Adivasi indigeneity, I posit that the indigenisation of Adivasis fulfils different objectives in the field of Development practice and international "aid" processes. I argue that the Development activists I follow in this story achieve, or attempt to achieve, these objectives through the narrativisation of Adivasi indigeneity.

Firstly, I analyse how a particular group of Adivasi communities try to consolidate the sustainability and permanence of their, and other disadvantaged communities', economic self-reliance through planting tea. Secondly, I examine how the social activists engaged with these Adivasi groups, try to realise such economic self-reliance through creating a new, fairer, and more sustainable economic system, on the basis of supposedly indigenous/tribal/Adivasi values. Thirdly, I show how these Development activists connect the different actors involved in these self-reliance efforts focused on tea planting, via narratives of Adivasi indigeneity.

I then argue that the activists manage to enlist the large group of different Development actors – and their financial support – necessary for such a "just" shift in economic relations, through the harnessing of a particular brand of Adivasi indigeneity in their stories. This conceptualisation of indigeneity corresponds largely with essentialised eco-romanticist imaginaries of "the indigenous", and therefore "the Adivasi", based on internationally current, reified notions of indigeneity.

Through first identifying the dominant elements of these Adivasi indigeneity narratives, and then analysing the pitfalls inherent in them, I bring to light the inconsistencies between activist-imagined Adivasi indigeneity narratives, and the multiplicity of conflicting identities of Adivasi peoples in India today.

Chai for change? concludes by investigating, on the one hand, whether the efforts of the Adivasi activists to create a more sustainable economic system, based on planting tea and informed by Adivasi values, help sustain a progressive and self-reliant Adivasi movement. On the other hand, I explore whether the activists' jumping on the indigenist rhetoric bandwagon, is in fact a useful strategy for Adivasis to overcome economic inequalities, (re)enforced and (re)produced by the complex intermeshing of ethnicity and caste in India. Specifically, I examine whether narrative-intensive indigenism is a useful strategy for dealing with Adivasi intersectionality – understood as the intersection of the multiple forms of discrimination Adivasis face. Or, whether indigenism's anachronistic elements – in particular the activists' adherence to an ecologically romantic conceptualisation of Adivasi values – possibly render the activists' rhetorical strategies counterproductive, and thereby create obstacles to sustaining the momentum of their movement.

Chai for change? is thus a narrative-focussed study of how conflictual notions of Adivasi indigeneity, harnessed for "development" ends by development activists, often become unravelled and entangled in tensions and contradictions, like a snarled-up ball of narrative yarn. I argue that the social activists try to offset this tendency by continually adapting the narrative of their stories, in an attempt to attract ever new and different audiences for their Adivasi tea revolution story.

To my mother Valerie (1947-2011),
to my father Alois (1950-1999),
to Jürgen Wagner (1981-2013),
to my Granny Nora,
to my sister Isabella,
to S.S. Manoharan (2012),
and to the Adivasi peoples of India.

Declaration

I, the authoress, declare that the material in this thesis has not previously been submitted by me or any other person for a degree or qualification at this or any other university or institution of higher learning.

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Acronyms, abbreviations, and glossary

ACCORD	Action for Community Organisation, Rehabilitation and Development
ACHR	Asian Centre for Human Rights
ADCs	Autonomous District Councils
ADSS	Adivasi-Dalit Samara Samithy (Adivasi-Dalit Action Council)
AFN	Asia Forest Network
AGMS	Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha, Kerala
AI	Amnesty International
AICFAIP	All India Coordinating Forum of the Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples
AITPN	Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network
AMS	Adivasi Munnetra Sangam Gudalur
ATP	Adivasi Tee Projekt, Germany
BJA	Bharat Jan Andolan (Indian Peoples' Movement)
BKS	Budakattu Krishikara Sangha
BP	(World) Bank Procedures
CAFAT	Collective for Action of Forest Adivasis in TN
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CFM	Community Forest Management
CORD	Coorg Organisation for Rural Development
CSD	Campaign for Survival and Dignity
DftI	Development from the Inside course on international development, Mysore
EPW	Economic and Political Weekly
FD	Forest Department (India)
FPIC	Free, prior, and informed consent
FPP	Forest Peoples Programme
FRA	Forest Rights Act, short for Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest-Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006
FT	Fair Trade
GfbV	Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker (Society for Threatened Peoples)
GIS	Geographic(al) Information System
IAITPTF	International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests
ICITP	Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples

ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IP	Indigenous peoples
IPF	Intergovernmental Panel on Forests
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
JCI	Just Change India
JCUK	Just Change UK
JFM	Joint Forest Management
MoEF	Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (India)
MoTA	Ministry of Tribal Affairs (India)
MRGI	Minority Rights Group International
MST	Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (Portuguese: Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra)
NAA	National Adivasi Alliance
NBA	Narmada Bachao Andolan (Friends of the River Narmada)
NBJHS	Nagarhole Budakattu Hakku Sthapana Samithi (Nagarhole Adivasi Rights Restoration Forum)
NCST	National Commission for the Scheduled Tribes
NFFPFW	National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers
NFTS	National Front for Tribal Self-Rule
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission (India)
NP	National Park
NTFP	non-timber forest products
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PESA Act	Provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PUCL	People's Union for Civil Liberties
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SAHRDC	South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre
SAs	Scheduled Areas
SCC	Supreme Court (of India) Case
SCST Act	Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
SEZ	Special Economic Zones

SMO	Social movement organisation
STs	Scheduled Tribes
TACs	Tribal Advisory Councils
TAF	Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation
taluk	an administrative sub-district for taxation purposes, typically comprising a number of villages
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNPFII	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
UN-REDD	United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in Developing Countries
UNWGIP	United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations
WB	World Bank
WRM	World Rainforest Movement
WS	Wildlife Sanctuary

A note on style and terminology

This is a story about stories. Accordingly, I reference many stories as part of telling a story about these stories. Stylistically, I represent these different text elements in different styles.

Adivasis' stories, and activists' stories about Adivasis, are rendered in italics, single space, and indented.

Longer citations by other authors are indented, single space, and smaller font

My own fieldwork diary extracts are single space.

In terms of terminology, special consideration is given to a discussion of the specific meaning, use, and interpretation of the terms tribal, Adivasi, and indigenous in the chapter "Some opening thoughts". Since I critically deal with the invention and re/presentation of ethnic identities, these terms are understood and treated as constructs. For the sake of fluidity, in so far as they pertain to Adivasis, they are used interchangeably throughout the text.

In another terminological matter, following Amita Baviskar (2012: 127), I distinguish between *Development* with a capital *D,* as in "the official world of Development – i.e. projects of welfare initiated by the state or NGOs and often funded by international agencies", as opposed to "development with a small *d*: a historical process of capitalist accumulation and legitimation where Development is embedded in a larger cultural politics that includes resource extraction, dispossession and displacement." As Baviskar (ibid.) notes,

> [t]his wider set of meanings is critical for illuminating how Development is understood and acted upon by '[D]evelopment workers', who include not only professionals employed by the state or NGOs, but also subaltern citizens engaged in the contentious business of staying alive in the face of entrenched inequalities underwritten by the state.

In terms of the name of the organisation that I deal with in this study, I use the double acronym AMS/ACCORD to represent all the different organisational sub-entitites that are part of AMS/ACCORD. Also, AMS/ACCORD is used synonymously with "the activists" and "Gudalur".

Lastly, a note on the spelling and transliteration of tribal communities' names. There are as many different spellings as publications about them, largely depending on the Tamil/Malayalam/Kannada into English transliteration used. Except where quoting other authors, I use the dominant spellings used by AMS/ACCORD.

Tiger got to hunt,
Bird got to fly;
Man got to sit and wonder, "Why, why, why?"

Tiger got to sleep,
Bird got to land;
Man got to tell himself he understand.

Kurt Vonnegut, Cat's Cradle (1963: 130)

Setting in motion a circle of stories

"A truer nomination for our species than Homo sapiens might be Homo narrans, the storytelling person." Henning Mankell (2012)

Let me tell you a story with many different versions; a story I myself first heard in February 2007 in a town called Gudalur in Tamil Nadu, South India, from a storyteller called Manoharan. He worked for an organisation called Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS). I, at the time, was researching Adivasi (tribal) land rights in South India for an MA dissertation at Vienna University. The story he told me is called "The March". It is about the first organised Adivasi land rights demonstration of the AMS in Gudalur on 5 December 1988 (Illustration 1). It is this story that inspired me to embark on a PhD, and which, in turn, transformed into the story you are reading.

Illustration 1 The picture of "The March" shown to me by Manoharan. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

"The March" begins with the story of "Chorian's Stand". The following version is from an ActionAid education pack, called "Chembakolli" (www.chembakolli.com), for the UK primary school geography curriculum:

Chorian had a small piece of land with pepper vines and a few coffee plants around his house. He used to work for very little in the rice fields of a rich landlord.

One day the landlord bought a new tractor to be used in his rice fields – but there was no road to the fields. So he came and just cut down Chorian's pepper and coffee and made a path to his fields. Chorian begged him, "Please do not do this to us. We have worked so hard to plant this."

The landlord ignored Chorian's pleading and continued to knock down all the trees and plants. Chorian was afraid to protest too much because he was dependent on the landlord for work.

But word spread like wildfire to all the other villages and everyone was very angry. Within half an hour 200 Adivasi men, women and children had gathered in Chorian's village to support him.

When the landlord came in his new tractor he found all the Adivasis blocking the path. He went and complained to the police. The police inspector came and started shouting at the Adivasis ordering them to move out of the way. But when they explained to him what had really happened he realised that the landlord had lied to him and started shouting at the landlord instead. In fact, he arrested the landlord for trespassing on Chorian's land! All of us were jubilant! An Adivasi had challenged a powerful landlord and won!

For many months a group of young Adivasis had been going from village to village, urging everyone to be united – to protect our land and stand up to the landlords, no matter how powerful they might be. They put on dramas about Adivasis being cheated, refused wages, about being 'coolies' on land that was once ours.

At first, we did not understand what this meant. True, the land had belonged to us, but over the years all kinds of people had come and taken it over. They had got the legal papers so we Adivasis had no option but to work as coolies for them – how could we get it back now?

But these young people argued, "We must fight. We must get our land back." Everyone wished with all their hearts that this would be possible, but we were afraid.

But the young people refused to give up. They called themselves 'animators' and kept coming again and again. They would not give up.

Before long, people were holding village meetings called sangams. Sangam means the meeting of rivers, like the coming together of people.

Suddenly we realised our strength in numbers. We began to feel less frightened and in 1988 our village sangams joined together to form one big sangam – the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam, or AMS.

The AMS moved quickly. A massive land-rights campaign was organised to help everyone fight for their lost land. And this led to a march in the nearest big town, Gudalur.

It was 5 December 1988. I woke early and was one of the first to arrive. There were about a 100 people. Then, slowly the numbers grew, hundreds became thousands and soon there were nearly 10,000 people. The streets were choked with people.

The procession took a whole day and all the buses and cars had to wait. The police thought the Adivasi were weak and were expecting only about 30 of us. But because the march was peaceful and well organised, we won respect from the government and non-tribal people.

It was a great day! Our shouts of protest were intermingled with a lot of singing and dancing, and there were a great many speeches. For the first time we heard our own language being spoken in public, through loud speakers.

But most important, it was the first time Adivasis had ever seen so many of their people gathered together in one place.

Everyone went home tired but now there was a new hope in the air, a new courage. The day made us realise that we were not alone in our struggle. From that day on we never looked back. Fear seemed to be a thing of the past.

The next morning Adivasi villages woke to the shouts of children. Little children were holding sangam flags and leading their friends through their village in a procession, shouting the slogans of the previous day's march. Perhaps it was because of this, perhaps it was because of the march – no one knows for sure.

That very evening a group of us, here in our village, gathered together and took one of the most important decisions of our lives...

The meeting reached long into the night and just as the sun was rising, we all agreed we would not wait for anyone to give us our land - we would just take it. (ActionAid and ACCORD 2009)

I also came across "Chorian's Stand" in an article called "Turning the tide", by a journalist and Adivasi and Dalit rights activist, Mari Marcel Thekaekara, co-founder of the NGO ACCORD (Action for Community Organization, Rehabilitation and Development), the organisation behind the AMS. Since this is targeted at a different audience, it will be noted that the story is told in a slightly different way:

When governments entered tribal lands they subjugated them. This was done in India, Australia, the US and everywhere in the world where aboriginal people were forced to accept the sovereignty of an aggressive, authoritarian regime. Their laws, systems and culture were totally overruled. They were catapulted into an alien world which placed them at a tremendous disadvantage and which forced them to deal with a legal, administrative and political system they did not understand. When they fumbled they were ridiculed and stereotyped as ignorant and inferior. And this left them vulnerable to exploitation by vested interests – both political and economic.

But it is not just a question of economic exploitation. Tribals face racial discrimination and economic exploitation because of their culture and ethos. Their culture does not prepare them for the aggressive, acquisitive world which moves in, exploits and demolishes their environment. It does not equip them to fight back.

In the development game are well-meaning social workers who want to help but are ultimately patronizing. They would be horrified at the suggestion that they are being racist, albeit unintentionally. But what is it, if not racist, to blunder in with the intention of 'uplifting', 'improving' and 'civilizing'? I have come across missionaries, – both Christian and Hindu – Gandhians and activists who've felt that for tribals to progress they must leave behind their 'quaint' ethnic customs.

When we began ACCORD (Action for Community Organization, Rehabilitation and Development) in 1986, we realized that mainstream India had entered the Adivasi world with a vengeance and that the people had to equip themselves with new skills in order to survive and regain some measure of dignity and pride. They needed to realize their own strength and potential.

In 1987, for the first time, the tide began to turn. Chorian, a Paniya tribal, was humiliated by a landlord who ran a tractor through Chorian's land, destroying precious coffee bushes and pepper vines. For years the feudal landlords of the area had trampled upon tribal rights. But this time 200 tribals rallied together within hours. The police arrived and ACCORD's

lawyer filed a suit on Chorian's behalf for damages. Word spread like wildfire. A tribal had actually resisted a powerful landlord. And, more importantly, tribals were banding together to resist exploitation and abuse.

In the seven years since that incident the tribals of Gudalur have come a long way. They no longer accept exploitation as their grandparents did. A strong Adivasi organization, the AMS (Adivasi Munnetra Sangam), has been formed to fight for tribal rights.

We all have a long way to go yet. There has to be a sustained effort to stop the onslaught which constantly tells Adivasis that they are inferior, backward and ignorant. And we have to drive home the message to Adivasi kids that their culture is something to be proud of and to convey the same message to the perpetrators of racism. Because unless both sides are convinced of this, the fight will be a futile one. (Marcel Thekaekara 1994b)

I decided to try and meet Mari. Through a happy coincidence I was able to take part in a course held in India by Mari and others. I eventually spent a year in Gudalur working with her, the other activists of AMS/ACCORD, and the Adivasis, and Mari and I became close friends. In Gudalur I also met Chathi, one of AMS's original "animators" (community activists) from the Paniya tribe (a member-tribe of the AMS), who participated in "The March" in 1988. Chathi, incidentally, also appears in the Chembakolli education pack, in which he narrates the following version of "The March". As will be noted, Chathi, in this activist rendering of views supposedly held by him, places particular emphasis on tribal values, old and new (developed as a result of the formation of the AMS): sharing, community, and tribal unity, and on the new identities Adivasis have adopted as a result of their engagement with Development: e.g. the cosmopolitan Adivasi and the Adivasi as the social analyst, in an inversion of North-South hierarchies.

Chathi talks about land rights (2008):

"Yes, I was there in 1988 (5 December land-rights march in Gudalur). But in those days there were only a few of us animators (community workers). We would go from village to village and put on dramas. We would tell them, "Adivasis are just like anyone else. We do not have to be another person's slave. If we are asking the government, we are not going to get their help. So we have to fight for the land."

We did a traditional drama first to attract all of their attention. Then we would add a drama about local issues, like Adivasis being cheated or some atrocities with the police... refusing payment or wages for Adivasis, people grabbing huge areas of our land... about being coolies (labourers) on the same land that was once ours.

The march was the first time we had come together without any fear. When I saw people coming from all over the place I thought the effort was worth it. We were not expecting so many to come. I felt hope for the future.

The police and the government did not know what to do. They did not know there were so many tribals in the area! They were totally at a loss. So many tribals kept coming – 10,000 in all from all five tribes. That day many people were hungry. There was not enough food in the town to feed everyone!

One person was chained and we were bringing him to the front of the procession to show our situation – how the forest officials were treating us. For the first time we spoke in our language in a public meeting, including the women. We used strong words to say what we felt and the government officials did not understand. This gave us a lot of courage.

It was like a big celebration – a happy day for us. I felt proud of being Adivasi.

The result is that we regained a lot of the land we had lost. We've had to really fight, and sometimes forcefully reclaim. Most people got back small plots of land. After 20 years, we still have a shortage of land. It is still not enough for everyone. I feel we have reclaimed about 2,500 acres from the government – as a community. There is no way we could afford to buy it. When I look at it like this, I see it as a big achievement. We would not have done this as individuals, on our own.

There is so much sharing going on. If another Adivasi comes and does not have a house, we say, "Ok, come and live here." I strongly feel there are still these values of sharing. Like at Chandran's wedding last week, people are poor and they still bought two to three kilos of rice. So many relatives from far off came out and helped and shared their food.

Before, we did not even think of ourselves. We did not know how to think of ourselves. There were people who said there is nothing beyond our forest, our village, beyond a few kilometres. They would have never been there.

Today, we have contact with people in India and abroad. We've learnt so much. Even rich Indians cannot afford to see places like the UK, but we have been and seen these places. We've learnt there are poor people in other countries too. We learnt there are people who are rich, who want to be richer. At the same time, there are people like us who are poor and want to help others.

I feel we are lucky to meet other cultures. Now we think globally, from the time when we lived only in the forest. Now, we analyse other people's problems in the UK." (ActionAid and ACCORD 2009)

*

Having introduced the central founding story of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam in Gudalur, I now begin with setting the scene for this thesis in the first chapter, "Some opening thoughts".

SOME OPENING THOUGHTS

"[T]he need to tell stories is what distinguishes humans from all other living creatures."
John D. Niles (1999)

Chapter map:

Part I

Setting the scene

Part II

Thesis map

Part I

Setting the scene

"Chai for change? Stories of Adivasi indigeneities, self-reliance, and activism" is about the central role of stories in the Development activities of a global alternative trading network originating out of a South Indian Adivasi (tribal/indigenous) organisation. This particular story, one of the many, deals with the nationally, ethnically, culturally, and socially diverse, anecdotising Development activists of this network. It examines how they resourcefully employ Adivasi indigeneity narratives to advance a "Development on their own terms" agenda of economic self-reliance for the Adivasis of the Gudalur valley of Tamil Nadu, South India. According to the aims of the activists, this economic self-reliance strategy should apply to other tribal and indigenous peoples across South Asia, and, indeed, globally.

"Chai for change?" is, therefore, a story about stories; more precisely, stories of Adivasi self-reliance, indigeneity, and activism. The central questions that this thesis seeks to address are:

1. how **stories** connect people,
2. how the tribal communities of Gudalur in Nilgiris District in Tamil Nadu, South India, try to achieve and consolidate the sustainability and permanence of their own **economic self-reliance**, as well as that of other disadvantaged communities,
3. how the group of social activists engaged with these Adivasi groups try to realise such economic self-reliance, through the creation of a **new, fairer, and more sustainable economic system** on the basis of supposedly indigenous/tribal/**Adivasi values**,
4. how these Development activists connect the different actors involved in these self-reliance efforts via **Adivasi indigeneity narratives**, and

5. how the development process of these tribal communities has consequently been informed by the activists' use of a **particular understanding of indigeneity**, out of which they have developed a **particular brand of Adivasi indigeneity** as a narrative tool.

These questions funnel towards the two central foci of this thesis: firstly, the ways in which the indigenisation of Adivasis fulfils different objectives in Development and international "aid" processes, and secondly, the way these development activists achieve, or attempt to achieve this, through the narrativisation of Adivasi indigeneity. I thus present, on the one hand, an ethnography of a particular way of thinking that the activists have developed about indigenous peoples in general, and Adivasis in particular. On the other hand, I provide a wider analysis of the use of indigenist rhetoric in Development.

"Chai for change?" is thus a narrative-focussed study of how conflictual notions of Adivasi indigeneity, harnessed for "development" ends by development activists, often become unravelled and entangled in tensions and contradictions, like a snarled-up ball of narrative yarn. I argue that the social activists try to offset this tendency by continually improving the narrative of their stories, in an attempt to attract ever new and different audiences.

What?

Broadly speaking, "Chai for change?" is situated in the areas of anthropology of Development, post-development, decolonial theory, organisational anthropology, anthropology of activism and social movements, economic anthropology, anthropology of self-reliance, fair/alternative trade, indigeneity, Adivasis, South India, narrative/storytelling, Development narratology, and in particular Adivasi narratology in Development. Specifically, this study is interested in the intersections between

1. communities' efforts to achieve economic self-reliance, Development narratives, and the economics of indigeneity,
2. Development/NGO activists in the Nilgiris/Tamil Nadu/South India, the UK, and Germany, and Adivasis in the Nilgiris/Tamil Nadu/South India, and
3. Adivasi narratology in Development, i.e. how the (mostly) non-Adivasi Development activists transform tribal narratives into stories of indigeneity, the different narrative strategies they have developed for this, and the different Development purposes this process fulfils.

Concretely, I critically analyse the strategy developed by the South Indian NGO ACCORD (Action for Community Organisation, Rehabilitation and Development) and its

Adivasi federation/producer cooperative offshoot AMS (Adivasi Munnetra Sangam), based in Gudalur, Tamil Nadu. In particular, this study traces the roles played by so-called tribal values in the development of this South Indian Adivasi (tribal) land rights movement into a global trading network called Just Change (JC). JC tries to directly link producer, consumer, and investor communities in a socially just and mutually beneficial economic relationship (Just Change India 2010b). Practically, this strategy involves the reclaiming of land by planting it, mainly, with tea (and coffee, spices, and medicinal herbs) as cash crops, and the development of other products (such as furniture from the pernicious lantana weed). These products are then marketed and sold India-wide through Just Change India (www.justchangeindia.com) and globally (mainly in the UK and Germany) through Just Change UK and the Adivasi Tee Projekt in Germany (www.adivasi-tee-projekt.org). The strategy of economic self-reliance – of connecting different disadvantaged communities in mutually beneficial economic relationships – developed by the activists[1] involves connecting and maintaining relationships with a vast number of different actors across a wide spectrum of Development arenas. The actors with whom AMS/ACCORD seek to establish relationships include, but are not necessarily limited to, village-based producer cooperatives/communities; politically/organisationally affiliated and non-affiliated Adivasis; other NGOs; national and international donors/grant-giving agencies, such as the Sir Ratan Tata Trust; Development organisations, such as Christian Aid and ActionAid; Indian, UK, and German volunteers, such as of the Adivasi Tee Projekt; and government officials, such as of the Forest Department.

I conducted fieldwork with AMS/ACCORD and other NGOs/activists (mainly CORD/NAA, Karnataka) and tribal movements (mainly TAF-Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation) in South India in 2009/10, with the JC India group in Gudalur in 2010, and the different JC nodes in the UK (mainly Oxford and Marsh Farm Luton) from 2010-present. As a fieldwork experiment, I set up JC Durham in 2010-present.

More specifically, this research hopes to address the relationship between culture and economy in Gudalur. I question AMS/ACCORD's agenda in representing local tribal communities as Adivasis and ask which role the concept of indigeneity has played in the development of AMS/ACCORD's self-reliance strategies. I examine the purpose that the unification of tribal communities in the Gudalur valley – under the umbrella term "indigenous

[1] "Social/tribal activists", "social entrepreneurs", "development professionals", etc. – the many different "hats [they] wear" or different "badges [they have] on [their] battered suitcases" (Stan Thekaekara), as variously described by the activists, self- and externally ascribed, are worth an analysis in their own right.

Adivasi" – which were previously distinct tribal groups before the arrival of Development professionals at the beginning of the 1980s, has served in AMS/ACCORD's Development agenda. By unification I mean, for one, rhetorically turning these culturally heterogenous groups into an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) that, depending on the context, is sometimes even portrayed as homogenous (especially in interaction and communication with a global audience). By unification I also mean the rallying of people from vastly different socio-economic backgrounds into one "indigenous" movement. This includes, for instance, gatherer-hunters (Kattunayakan), previously bonded labourers (Paniya), and agriculturalists who have been Hindu- and Western-educated for several generations (Mullukurumba). Considering these socio-economic differences, I examine the commonalities on the basis of which Adivasis are united. These are, for instance, the shared problems – eviction, land alienation, loss of traditional rights to forest produce, harassment by forest department officials, displacement, and human rights atrocities (Thekaekara 1993), and the shared resistance against double economic exploitation – the alienation from both the means of production and the product of their labour (Kjosavik 2011: 128).

Next I scrutinise the rhetorical strategies, and here in particular the indigenist rhethoric, AMS/ACCORD employ in their narrativisation of tribal-turned-into-Adivasi cultures. How are AMS/ACCORD, for instance, relaunching the narrative of how the non-indigenous world can benefit from the "age-old wisdom" of indigenous people – the mould Adivasis are cast in in this narrative – for non-indigenous audiences? In particular, I analyse which kinds of Adivasi identity constructions AMS/ACCORD employ in order to attract interest, and hence funding, from international aid organisations such as Oxfam, ActionAid, Christian Aid, and the Charities Advisory Trust. I am also interested in how these international agents in turn aid in the reproduction of an exclusive and essentialised Adivasi identity, and which of the tribal communities native to the Nilgiris, for instance, fit the bill, and which do not.

I evaluate where AMS/ACCORD's particular conception of Adivasi indigeneity originates and how their rhetorical strategies tie up with those of similar indigenist movements, in the region and internationally. What influence have, for instance, the global indigenous peoples discourse, and the essentialised notions of other indigenous peoples' struggles, such as Native American and Australian Aboriginal struggles, had on the way the activists conceptualise Gudalur Adivasi identity?

I posit that AMS/ACCORD's concept of Adivasi indigeneity exhibits certain flaws. In doing so, however, it is not my aim to "expose" the activists or establish analytical

superiority. Rather, I concur with Shah (2010: 35), who writes of her own enquiry into indigeneity constructions in Jharkhand:

> In this critical and grounded exploration of indigeneity, my aim is not to promote an exposure of indigenous rights activism. We do not have to show them up, or argue that indigenous identity is created strategically and made into an invented tradition by maximising goal-oriented actors who are pursuing their own ends. But we should pursue our careful and committed scholarship and highlight the need to pay attention to the voices that are not usually heard in transnational, or even national, forums,[2] as well as the processes which lead to their marginalization. So as scholars and political actors, we should not hesitate to ask the questions: Who is representing whom, and how and why? Who and what are left out? And what are the unintended consequences?

I also consider the limitations of AMS/ACCORD's development approach. In particular, I look at the effect their Development interventions have had on tribal "culture", and whether "Development" has in fact been detrimental for indigenous cultures. Can a concerted effort at reviving Adivasis' indigenous cultures reverse the cultural decline brought about by "Development"? I question whether such a drive should not best come from each of the communities themselves, i.e. from within, rather than "inducing" such a move from outside (the NGO), in order to be successful. Is it not after all the Adivasis' right, according to the prevalent rights-based development paradigm, to decide the fate of their indigenous cultures? On the other hand, one has to ask whether Adivasis in fact have a choice, pressurised as they are, on one side, by the government and NGOs, and on the other side, by market forces to enter the mainstream.

Finally, I analyse how the answers to these questions on tribal development compare to AMS/ACCORD's rhetoric that they "do" Development differently, i.e. by helping Adivasis enter the mainstream "on their own terms", with "heads held proud and high", and with a secure income through tea, and a new identity as tea growers to fall back on. Have they, as they assiduously claim, indeed been able to hand over the organisation to the Adivasis, as originally planned? Or is the trick of "Development" in fact to arrange stories largely so that events appear to be the outcome of careful planning, as suggested by Mosse (2011: 155)?

As mentioned earlier, I address these questions by analysing the stories the AMS/ACCORD activists tell about Adivasis, and the way the activists narrativise tribal lives and their work with Adivasis. In particular, it is (supposedly) tribal values that they seek to foreground with and in their stories. It is to a more detailed discussion of this focus on narratives, and the "Adivasi values" contained in them, that I now turn.

[2] Naturally, it is difficult to know who is left out because it is precisely their invisibility that prevents us from seeing and thus including them.

A story of narratives about Adivasis and their value systems

I argue that the activists attempt and, at times more or less successfully, accomplish the linking of the different players involved in their Development work, in an economically beneficial network (their tagline being "connecting communities"), by, inter alia, constructing and circulating narratives of ostensibly Adivasi (tribal/indigenous) values within this network. This network I examine in more detail in the next section. According to the activists, central to these Adivasi values are notions of *community* (and the unity thereof) and *environmental stewardship*. Various streams of criticism (e.g. Baviskar 1997, 2006; Prasad 2003; Shah 2007, 2010) have been developed against this kind of ecological romanticisation of Adivasis (and so-called indigenous peoples in general) employed by activists in their narrativisation of tribal indigeneity. This criticism has validly exposed the "dark side of indigeneity" (Shah 2007, 2010) of, variously,

- "eco-incarcerating" (Shah 2012) tribal peoples;
- favouring dominant (read socially and financially better connected, urban, higher class, and technologically savvy) Adivasi voices to the detriment of internally marginalised sections of the tribal population (e.g. Adivasi women or those Adivasis not affiliated with an NGO);
- placing too much emphasis on imported notions of indigeneity that equate people with their territory. Though this may work in New World settings such as the Americas, Australia or New Zealand, it cannot be applied one to one without creating dissonances in migration-intensive contexts such as "the complex social world of South Asia [where] almost any group can present itself as indigenous and as threatened by invading Others" (van Schendel 2011: 28);
- inadvertently patronising and thus further marginalising "Adivasi voices" (Tilche 2011) by, for instance, "exposing" Adivasi aphasia (voicelessness) (Devy 2006, Devy 2008).

There is a "dark side of indigeneity" also to the strategic use of indigenous narratives by movements. Various scholars have exposed dominant interpretations of indigenous narratives as hegemonic constructions (see, for instance, Steur 2011b). As Steur (2011a: 74) writes, "there is now a growing body of work that critically analyzes the 'dark side' of indigenism (Shah 2007), demonstrating that it tends to lead followers straight back to the structures of oppression they sought to escape". Steur's argument is that if hegemonic (state) interpretations of indigenous politics remain only culturalist, a self-reinforcing cycle of dis-

articulation is inevitable. According to her, this only reinforces cultural stereotypes about indigenous/tribal peoples and keeps them marginalised or further marginalises them.

Prasad (2003: 108) argues that "the theory and practice of ecological romanticism prevents […] movements from opening up the discourse to an alternative notion of modernity" and that it is "ahistorical as [it does] not take the problems of feudal and capitalist exploitation into account". Instead she calls for "modern tools to create egalitarian relations of production" (Prasad 2003: 109). Accordingly, I investigate whether the efforts of the Adivasi activists followed in this thesis to create a new, fairer, and more sustainable economic system, informed by Adivasi values, amounts to such a modern tool, or whether their adherence to an ecologically romantic conceptualisation of Adivasi values, rooted in a fictitious golden past, in fact creates obstacles to sustaining the momentum of their movement.

I now return to the notion of an Adivasi Development network created through the narratives about Adivasis circulated within this network.

A story of a narrative Development network

In my analysis I focus on a core set of related stories I encountered while (physically and virtually) travelling with the different activists, as they ceaselessly wove a narrative web among Development participants of heterogenous origin. By weaving such a web they created a narrative community. These stories were constantly retold and reassembled across this narrative network, reappearing in different guises according to different contexts. As they did throughout the fieldwork, these stories weave a narrative web throughout this thesis, disappearing and reappearing in different forms, as text, video (in the form of youtube links at the end of chapters in audiovisual and visual postscripts), and audio.

Writing about international Development, Mosse (2006: 940) suggests that development projects work through the creation of interpretative communities, which create and sustain a certain interpretation of events, since what is important is control over the interpretation of events. Project rituals, such as focus groups or report writing, work to legitimise as well as produce the coherence of interpretations, while managing possible disjunctures. Analogously, I propose that the precondition for the "success" of Adivasi indigeneity narratives, in creating and maintaining a network, is the existence of a bounded interpretative community, whose members share similar notions of Adivasi indigeneity. By bounded I mean connected by a common interpretation of notions of Adivasi indigeneity. What I try to identify in this study are therefore the narrative mechanisms and strategies the activists invent and employ, to continuously create and maintain such an interpretively bounded community, and, by

extension, the Development network that enables them to carry out their work with Adivasi peoples.

In the process of travelling along the different channels of this network of Development actors, AMS/ACCORD's tales of Adivasi indigeneity ricochet off different walls: for instance religion (mainly Christian, esp. liberation theology); political ideologies (mainly Marxist/eco-socialist); and theories (Development and development theories, feminism, environmentalism, and so forth). In the process, these stories are continuously reinterpreted and ideologically reinvested. They acquire new layers of meaning and become partially inconsistent and contested (both within and outside the network). Most importantly, *they acquire an agency of their own so that their interpretive outcomes often contradict and even diametrically oppose their intended meanings, thus again questioning the rhetorical soundness of the original narratives*. Much like the wider Development processes they are part of, they are contradictory and never unambiguous.

I ask how the re/presentation of Adivasis' lived realities is transformed through their emplotment by Development activists. What happens, for instance, when the stories cross the boundaries of this narrative community? How do the members of this interpretative community try to guard against this (for instance by restricting access to their activities or turning "access" into a prerogative of NGO "family" members)? Ultimately, I seek to bring to light and question the activists' various positionalities, so as to arrive at a possibly more critical reading of Adivasi indigeneity narrativisation by Development NGOs. Development and its practitioners are also, then, a crucial part of this story.

A story of Development and its practitioners and activists

"Chai for change?" is fundamentally also a story about "Development" and its practitioners, professionals, and activists. The question that originally drew me to researching AMS/ACCORD was *whether this particular "tribal" organisation was different in its operation to the other organisations I had encountered in the region,* since it appeared to be both more effective and efficient in mobilising the financial, cultural, and social capital necessary for raising the socio-economic status of its tribal members, compared to the average NGO that works with tribals in Tamil Nadu (most "tribal" organisations are – contrary to their assertions – initiated and run by non-tribals). If this was the case, how did they operate differently?

After comparing the data I gathered during the course of my fieldwork with AMS/ACCORD in Gudalur, 2009/10, with data from fieldwork with other organisations in

Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, in 2003, 2007, and 2009/10, I arrived at a significant insight. One of the ways AMS/ACCORD differed significantly from the other organisations (TAF, Tamil Nadu, CORD/NAA, Karnataka, and Neethi Vedi, Kerala in this case) was the way their non-tribal activists (mainly those as opposed to the Adivasis themselves) appeared to be more successful at connecting different Development actors from vastly different backgrounds, across transnational boundaries, than the activists of the other organisations I knew in the region. The latter, in fact, regularly lamented their relative lack of connections (compared to AMS/ACCORD). Indeed, they cast a discernibly envious glance towards Gudalur, and what AMS/ACCORD had achieved with the Adivasis there. This is understandable in light of the competitive terrain of the South Indian NGO landscape. As Mosse (2011: 165) observes, "[t]he competitive environment of Adivasi districts in which NGOs or departments try to secure clients for their programmes is infused with notions of territoriality, loyalty and obligation".

As a result of the above comparison, several further issues came to my notice. For one, the Gudalur activists appeared to be more accomplished storytellers in terms of how well they were able to capture a given audience's imagination, and thus enlist their practical and financial participation. The depth of connection with their audiences was mainly achieved through a) the continual infusion of their everyday Development work with narrative, e.g. in the retelling of stories over lunch, in the tribal school's curriculum, and in their cultural activities. For example, at the outset of ACCORD in the mid-1980s the activists trained a tribal theatre troupe, which travelled from tribal village to village, visualising the Adivasis' plight. In doing this, ACCORD sought both to mobilise the earlier tribal activists to reclaim land, as well as to conscientise today's Adivasi youth by having them re-enact their parents' and grandparents' 1988 land rights march through Gudalur. The connection with their audiences was also established through b) the constant dissemination and trading of the narratives about their work across AMS/ACCORD's Development network. These were chiefly stories about the particular value and belief systems of the Gudalur tribes, expressed in their own tribal stories, in their everyday lifestyle choices and actions, and the way the Gudalur tribals interacted with their environment(s) and non-tribals. The activists were very astute at transforming these (originally) locally rooted, embodied, and performed stories of the Gudalur tribes into what they considered to be stories of value and significance for Indian Adivasis in general, indigenous peoples worldwide, and, ultimately, humanity as a whole. Through this the stories acquired a universal appeal. The activists were also very adept at connecting these Adivasi stories with, and drawing inferences from, other tribal and

indigenous peoples' lives in storified form. The Development activists thus acted as intermediaries in the retelling of these stories of tribal origin and about tribals, and gave them a particular interpretive spin. The activists posited Gudalur Adivasis as paragons of social, communal, environmental, and economic virtue, on par only with other indigenous peoples (and again only those eligible in their eyes – such as Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians, the two examples most often cited by the activists). In this the activists were attempting to set standards that, in the activists' estimation, the rest of humanity should both learn from and aspire to, in an effort to create a more convivial togetherness and ultimately ensure the survival of everyone on this planet.

To summarise, the central questions I asked myself as a result of these observations during fieldwork were:

1. Why did AMS/ACCORD appear to be more "successful" than other similar NGOs?
2. Why did they appear to be able to harness "better" narratives?
3. What made their narratives appear more "successful"?

In terms of my ethnographic methodology it was my subsequent fieldwork, across the aforementioned transnational boundaries, in the UK (with JCUK and through setting up JC Durham) and Germany (the Adivasi Tee Projekt), and online and via email with India from 2010 (ongoing), that prompted me to shift my focus to 1) recording and categorising these narratives, 2) identifying the epistemic communities that have sprung up around the shared stories circulated within them, such as the one surrounding JC, 3) tracing how these narratives travel between these epistemic communities forming the AMS/ACCORD/JC network, and 4) analysing and comparing the stories at different temporal and geographical points.

During the compilation of these Development activist stories (see "Appendix 1 – List of stories") I started to classify them according to their different

1. thematic content:

- stories of indigenous cultural resilience in the face of economic and cultural encroachment;
- stories of the merit of "timeless" indigenous values in a world perceived as increasingly devoid of such values;
- stories of connecting disadvantaged communities across economic, social, and geographical barriers through mutually rewarding, and thus socially just trade;
- stories of personal activist sacrifice for "the greater Development good".

2. origins:

- tribal stories: originally oral tribal stories of the four different tribes that were and are being recorded by the activists, and used in their materials;
- Adivasi views: stories of statements made by Adivasis, retold by the activists, that are intended to represent, in the activists' estimation, views and values particular to Adivasis;
- events: retellings of events by the activists;
- stories in official reports;
- reflections: by the activists, either privately recorded by myself, or by the activists themselves on blogs (of often intense self-scrutiny) and websites, such as "In the shade of a forest tree" (Thekaekara 2008-09), " ... ... - ... earlier called Musings" (Manoharan 2012), "Mind the gap – thoughts from the underground" (Thekaekara 2010b), "At the edge of existence. Indigenous cultures and conservation" (The Shola Trust 2013-present), "Shola Trust Blog" (The Shola Trust 2010-present), "Marginally speaking" (Marcel Thekaekara 2001-present), and the "Chembakolli blog" (AMS/ACCORD and ActionAid 2012), to name but a few.

3. different purposes: for instance, mobilisation, instruction, elicitation of empathy, and the forging of connections.

I then analysed the stories for the recurring (supposedly) Adivasi values and characteristics the activists ascribe to tribals and seek to promote in their work: for instance tribal unity, community, sharing, environmental stewardship, intergenerational learning, honesty, kindness, non-acquisitiveness, and traditionalism, among others. Lastly, I looked at how the stories "worked", and what they produced. Crucial to this is an understanding of narrative.

A story of narrative

> *If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a story is worth a thousand assurances.*
> Annette Simmons (2007)

What is a narrative? Flynn (2008: 308), citing Roe (1991, 1995) and Roth (1989), states that

> [f]or definition purposes, Emery Roe argues that they can be compared to stories, but that they are designed to bring about action and are resilient to challenge, even when wisdoms upon which they are based are shown to be untrue. As Roth notes, 'the truth of a narrative is not necessarily determinable from the truth of its parts' (Roth 1989: 456).

How do we as human beings relate to narrative? Human beings are storied animals. Human brains are attuned to stories (Boyd 2009). Telling stories is a way of planting ideas, thoughts, and emotions in people's minds. When telling a story, the storyteller's and the listeners' brains synchronise (Stephens, Silbert et al. 2010). We connect, create, and live

through stories. Narratives are cognitive shortcuts, allowing us to digest complex information and relationships more easily. Narrative reworkings of reality enable people to symbolically alter subject-object relations (Jackson 2002). We (try to) control the interpretation of and thereby possess the past through its narrativisation. Ultimately, we become human through stories. As anthropologists, it is through stories that we become inextricably bound to the people we research. This points to the universality of the human activity of storytelling, and at the same time to its cultural specificity, manifested in the myriad different forms of storytelling humans have evolved.

How is narrative constructed? Structurally, Freytag (1965), in his classic analysis of dramatic structure, divides the narrative arc into the components exposition, rising action, crisis, climax (resolution), and falling action (denouement):

> [E]ven the simplest narrative, if it is highly engaging and follows the classic dramatic arc outlined by the German playwright Gustav Freytag, can evoke powerful empathic responses associated with specific neurochemicals, namely cortisol and oxytocin. […] [T]he neurochemical oxytocin is responsible for virtuous behaviors, working as the brain's 'moral molecule'. […] Those brain responses, in turn, can translate readily into concrete action – in the case of Dr. Zak's study subjects, generous donations to charity and even monetary gifts to fellow participants. By contrast, stories that fail to follow the dramatic arc of rising action/climax/denouement – no matter how outwardly happy or pleasant those stories may be – elicit little if any emotional or chemical response, and correspond to a similar absence of action. (Casebeer and Zak 2012)

The use of narratives in this research encompasses the following:

- This research is a story.
- Stories and storytelling are central forms of Adivasi cultural expressions.
- The two central concepts examined in this research, self-reliance and indigeneity, travel through stories in AMS/ACCORD's Development network.
- Stories are pivotal for AMS/ACCORD's Development strategies: as mobilisation/communication etc. tools, e.g. in training the next generation of Adivasi youth to become community mobilisers (AMS 2009b) or in anti-alcohol campaigns. I thus treat the activists' writings as a type of Development literature. This concern with Development texts, and writing about Development, points to the – even if often neglected - importance of narrative in Development.

A story of narrative in Development processes

The focus on stories, narrative, and narrativity in, broadly speaking, Development processes and social movements (from an Indian, and Adivasi perspective in particular) draws its inspiration from Hugo Gorringe's (2010) "Resounding Rhetoric, Retreating Rebels: The Use and Impact of Militant Speeches in Tamil Dalit Movements", Kirin Narayan's "Mondays on

the Dark Night of the Moon" (Narayan 1997), J.E. Davis' (2002) "Narrative and Social Movements", Erving Goffman's (1959) ideas on frontstate/backstage, Michael Carrithers's (2010) "Social Form and its Craft-y Use", Clifford Geertz's (1973) "The Interpretation of Cultures", Emery Roe's work on narrative in Development (Roe 1991, Roe 1994, 1995), and Richard Kearney's (2002) "On Stories".

With Development interactions being fundamentally human interactions, stories provide the proverbial "glue" for meaningful Development encounters. Over the course of my ethnographic explorations, I witnessed how the presence (and lack), and effective communication of good narratives may influence the outcome of Development processes.

This becomes clearer if we ask ourselves, for instance, what it is that lends credibility to and wins our support for a Development project. Often, Development begins with a story. It is through these stories that we are first courted by Development organisations, and introduced to their campaigns and projects. Development professionals are encouraged to tell the "human stories" behind their figures and graphs, in order for people to be able to relate to life worlds (often fundamentally) different from their own. Research scholars, as well as writers of Development evaluations, are counselled to illustrate their findings with "stories from the field". On flyers and leaflets, AIDS orphans, indigenous warriors, and impoverished farmers – stock characters of Development stories – compete for decreasing attention spans, with the help of their poignant "stories".

Despite the prominence of narrative in Development, I posit, however, that the role of storytelling, and the analysis thereof, has hitherto been undervalued in the study of Development processes. I argue that narrative, as a fundamental currency of human interaction and communication, merits a deeper analysis as to its function in enabling, maintaining, and possibly also sabotaging (certain) Development agendas. Accordingly, I am interested in what happens when the stories that have previously held a Development network together peter out, and what consequences the failure of a narrative network can have. Based on my observations, I tentatively conclude that it is, inter alia, the "power" of stories and their presence/absence, and constant retelling, that make or break Development relationships, and hence help negotiate the power relationships inherent in Development encounters. Ultimately, I hope to shed some light on what distinguishes a good Development story well told.

This leads me on to shed more light on the central conduit of the Adivasi narratives, homo narrans, the storytelling human, in their avatars as human rights activists and writers about Adivasis.

A story of homo narrans – the storytelling human in the guise of Development activists

Storytelling demands constant energy to maintain the desired outcome. If a storyteller is not present to maintain her or his story web, the web falls apart. I deal with the effect of the absence of formerly prominent storytellers extensively in the later chapters. In order to maintain their narrative webs, storytellers avail themselves of different narrative strategies. Marketing theory distinguishes between push and pull strategies. In marketing parlance, the narrative strategy of manipulation, for instance, is a push strategy. In contrast, persuasion through the influence of charisma is a pull strategy. The latter is an incredibly important attribute of successful storytelling development activists, as I will demonstrate in later chapters. Storytelling is another pull method of influence, as a story lets listeners decide for themselves. The successful application of storytelling is thus a significant marker of influence. It is this contrast between mere manipulation and storytelling that is significant. Because they share many overlapping characteristics though, it is important to examine what distinguishes storytelling from mere manipulation.

Undoubtedly, narratives are, to a certain extent, manipulative. Accordingly, successful storytellers have to be versed in the art (or transgression) of deception. Deception, on its own, is an inferior method of persuasion though. Although I have witnessed several examples of AMS/ACCORD activists trying to persuade Development actors to believe a story about Adivasis that is not quite true, this is for obvious reasons not a strategy they fall back on by default. Correspondingly, the AMS/ACCORD storytellers are not mere manipulators. Instead, the activists have, over the years, honed a different craft to a self-prescribed level of perfection, i.e. of telling a credibly authentic and therefore authentically persuasive story. This is a much more powerful means of influence. It is also a craft that demands storytelling skills, i.e. in the activists' case the ability to authentically narrativise their own and Adivasis' experience of being alive as human beings, and the ability to successfully relay this to the participants in their narrative web in a manner and language intelligible to them.

In order to be able to exert influence, storytellers also need to establish enough trust – another pull strategy – to successfully deliver their message(s). The audience's trust in who one is as a storyteller is the connection that serves as the conduit for one's message. Since the activists do not always have the time and opportunity to build trust based on personal acquaintance, the best they can do is to tell stories that simulate the experience of their trustworthiness. Hearing their stories is thus as close as an audience can get to the first-hand experience of seeing them "walk the walk", as opposed to only "talk the talk."

It is thus in the prioritisation of pull over push strategies that part of the "success" of the activists' stories lie.

Why do some narratives "work", and others not? And *how* do the ones that do, "work"? Consequently, which narratives do the activists give preference to? In terms of the stories I encountered during my research, I would identify, along the lines of Simmons (2007), six types that the activists used to influence their audiences:

1. The *Who am I?* narratives that derive their credibility from *demonstrating*, rather than telling someone who one is. A story lets one demonstrate who one is much more easily than a mere accumulation of facts, without a narrative thread to hold them together. An example is Stan's (one of AMS/ACCORD's original founders) bicycle story from his time working with the Ho (an Adivasi tribe) in Bihar in the 1970s, which demonstrates directly, rather than merely tells the audience his prowess in negotiating with foreign donor organisations. As the charismatic de-facto head of AMS/ACCORD he has worked in Adivasi Development since his student days and proudly identifies himself with Adivasis' cultural ethos and values in every possible way. As an expert storyteller, polyglot and multicultural polymath he moves and interprets effortlessly between different cultural, class, religious, gendered, etc. spheres.
2. The *Why am I here?* narratives that put an audience at ease, by telling them beforehand, and thereby pre-empting, an audience's scepticism, and the question of what benefit is in the act of storytelling for the storyteller him- or herself. Examples are the activists' favoured opening line at meetings, workshops, etc. of "I am here today to learn from you", and the oft-repeated line of "People accuse us of being romanticists, but our decades-long engagement with Adivasis has convinced us…".
3. The *My vision/inspirational* narratives: Once trust has been established with an audience, their guard has been lowered, and listener(s) are more comfortable with who they now believe the storyteller to be, and why s/he is here, an audience is more receptive to listen to what the storyteller thinks is the reward for engaging with her or his story. This is the point at which activists would start interjecting their talks with the prefatory rhetorical device of "This reminds me of a story…".
4. The *Instructive* narratives: Often the message storytellers want to send is less about *what* they want the recipient(s) to do, and more about *how* they want something done. As a tool of instruction, narrative is best suited to combine *what* with *how*.
5. The *Values in action/manuals for life* narratives: One way to teach a value is "by example". Another is to tell a story that provides an example. Narrative allows one to

instil values in a way that allows people to arrive at insights themselves. Values, however, have less meaning without stories to bring them to life that engage the listener on a personal level. And personal stories are in turn the best way to engage people on a personal level. Correspondingly, most of the activists' stories would be drawn from their treasure chest of personal stories of interactions with Adivasis that convinced them of the special "value" of tribal cultures (and therefore, the need to protect and champion them).

6. The *"I know what you are thinking"/empathetic* narratives: For storytellers it is important to identify the potential objections to their message(s) that the people whom they wish to influence may harbour. By naming people's potential objections first, storytellers try to disarm and thus win over their listeners. This often works because people more easily release objections if they have not yet positioned themselves by voicing them. An audience may, in fact, feel gratitude towards a storyteller for not having to voice their objections if a storyteller has shown respect towards her or his listeners by thinking through their perspectives. The activists are well versed in the standard criticisms levied against their work (in different colours and different degrees of vociferousness from different quarters). This is understandable considering the nature of their non-mainstream (in an Indian context) positions on Adivasis, and their work of defending not only territorially, but also culturally, as well as economically, encroached tribal peoples. AMS/ACCORD have hence evolved, and built into their work, elaborate mechanisms of self-criticism and self-evaluation. These go beyond and, in fact, often deride donor obligations. A favoured story of Stan's (introduced above) is one about an evaluator sent from a German donor organisation, who in the end did not produce his own evaluation, but copied AMS/ACCORD's verbatim.

This (by no means complete selection of) different types of activist stories, as will be seen in the later chapters by means of their analysis, were in use by the activists at different times, for different ends, and in different contexts.

I now turn to issues of narrative control, allegiance, edges, and gaps.

On the need for the constant narrative control of the encoding and decoding of Adivasi indigeneity narratives

Fieldwork diary, 13/05/2010, Gudalur

I am beginning to see in publications such as the AMS newsletter, etc. what Mosse (2005: 2) has described as "actors in development devot[ing] their energies to maintaining coherent representations regardless of events".

Stuart Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model emphasises the performative nature of stories, i.e. how the "success" of the development activists' stories, i.e. them being decoded by the recipients in the way the development activists intend them to, inter alia, hinges on the mastery of the storyteller, her or his charm, personality, the skilfulness of his narrative delivery, how well s/he is able to engage her/his audience, and to what extent the narrator is able to make her/his and her/his' audiences' circles of understanding overlap/congruent. For instance, Stan's performative prowess in his storytelling, or his particular form on a given day, play a large role in how the same story is received by different audiences.

Hall's (1973) suggestion that messages accrue their status of being common sense in part from their repeated performance is a well-known one. By common sense I mean for an audience to be(come) uncomfortable, and thus also subliminally fearful, to think against the grain of the intended/dominant meaning(s), to the point where any other meaning(s), no matter how cogent, than the one intended by the storyteller, become unnatural. Equally, for the development activists to establish their culturally specific understanding(s) and interpretation(s) of Adivasi indigeneity not only as plausible und universal, but as common sense, stories to corroborate them have to be kept in continuous, repeated circulation. In order to have the desired effect(s) for different settings (ranging from an Adivasi hamlet to a Development organisation boardroom), these stories have to be performatively adapted to suit different audiences. This requires storytellers (to be) able to mediate, negotiate, translate, interpret, and code-switch between different contexts.

Narrative allegiance/loyalty

Not only do the activists' intended message(s) have to be constantly reinforced through the feeding of stories to everyone in their network(s), but the content of the stories itself has to be subject to constant change, in order to create and maintain narrative allegiance and loyalty to the stories, and hence of the different actors in the development network to each other. Narrative novelty helps create narrative allegiance and loyalty.

As I show in this thesis, the strategy of creating narrative allegiance sometimes works and sometimes does not in AMS/ACCORD's case. What I am interested in are 1) the narrative gaps, and what happens in and as a result of these gaps, and 2) what happens at the edges of these narratives.

On the edges of narrative

According to Roe (1994), narratives are strategic simplifications that help policymakers in the face of situations whose complexity can instil policy paralysis. They generate consensus around major policies and make political action possible. Crucially, however, narratives – unlike what we understand by science today – are not falsifiable. Narratives slip through the loopholes of scientific validation. Even though narratives may sometimes draw on scientific authority to lend themselves credibility and legitimacy in a world of narrative competitiveness, narratives exist precisely in order to circumvent and present in a more digestible manner scientific complexity and contingency. Narratives are also deliberately *designed* to be conceptually fuzzy and imprecise, to allow both the storyteller narrative licence and the audience narrative agency. Thus, as previously detailed, I found the development activists to be exercising considerable poetic licence in the retelling of their stories about Adivasis, depending on the context. The activists directed the stories' agency to fit different contexts, freely making use of embellishment, exaggeration, and selectiveness. To what extent does this render their narratives problematic, however, and creates narrative gaps?

Narrative gaps

Consequently, I am interested in what happens, for instance, when narrative allegiance is ruptured, or simply disintegrates because the narrative thread breaks. What happens, for instance, when stories remain unfinished, only partly told, or not told at all? Mary Douglas (1986: 16) has argued that institutions do not have minds of their own but, rather, individuals in a social group share a symbolic universe. This results in group solidarity, which is, inter alia, facilitated by the shared stories circulated within the group. A lack of new stories leads to a loss of personal interest, thus less motivation to contribute individual action to a group. Correspondingly, a lack in stories leads to group disintegration.

Accordingly, I examine what happens when either the "wrong" stories, a lack of stories, or a lack of novelty in the stories leads to, at first, a lessening of interest on the part of the audience (and a concomitant flocking to those with the "better" stories about the Development beneficiaries – in this case Adivasis), and subsequently a decline in interactions within the narrative network and consequently, in AMS/ACCORD's case, a partial failure of the Development project. I hence ask whether, in this case, narrative failure equals Development failure.

Furthermore, I consider what happens then when an organisation, group, tribe, etc. loses one of its chief storytellers, as was the case for AMS/ACCORD with the passing of Manoharan, AMS/ACCORD's secretary, and the father of KTS (the Adivasis' tea plantation

manager), reflecting the larger issue of the loss of tribal culture at the death of elders. This is what G.N. Devy (2006) would term a form of Adivasi aphasia (voicelessness). Another form of Adivasi aphasia, however, consists in the inadvertent or deliberate exclusion of certain Adivasi voices.

The exacerbation of Adivasi aphasia

"The truth about Adivasis lies far beyond the realm of the verbal."
G.N. Devy (2006: 10)

Fieldwork diary, 24/11/2009, Gudalur

It was found that insurance contributions had gone down by 20% in three areas only. The reasons for this were discussed at the all-team meeting. My impression of this meeting yesterday was that it was mostly Stan and Manoharan talking. If nobody said anything, Stan would start again, or he would ask questions, but nobody would respond. Mahesh said they were not talking openly about it and that there may be many reasons for this. Participative decision-making is indeed incredibly difficult – it takes a long time for everyone's voices to be heard.

For marketing executives, such as those employed to create a brand image for Development organisations such as ActionAid or Oxfam, concepts such as narrative control and allegiance are Marketing 101. As Sachs (2012b) asserts, "today's media landscape of unprecedented competition between messages has made us all marketers." As Alpa Shah (2007, 2010) and others have shown though, this process tends to favour certain dominant understandings of Adivasi indigeneity while sidelining or even silencing other equally, though possibly not as eco-romantically attractive Adivasi voices. This lack of tribal self-representation has historical roots. As Prasad (2003: 97) notes, in official records tribals' own perceptions were few and far in-between.

Accordingly, I am interested in what some of the suppressed Adivasi voices may be in AMS/ACCORD's case. I argue that their favouring of certain narratives may in fact contribute to, rather than tackle Adivasi aphasia (Devy 2006). This mirrors AMS/ACCORD's argument that the field of anthropology has, equally, suppressed and favoured certain Adivasi voices. This I discuss in the section "A critique of (Western) anthropology by Adivasis and Adivasi representatives" in the chapter "Behind the scenes – methods and tools".

Lastly, in keeping with the themes of homo narrans and inclusion/exclusion, I wish to include the anthropologist, as a storyteller, in this dicussion of narrative. Ultimately, this ethnographic study is also a story about anthropology and its practitioners.

A story of anthropology – an anthropological story

The analytic focus on narrative in this thesis stems both from a personal passion for stories and storytelling, and their central, even if not always explicitly stated, importance for the people I encountered during my ethnographic meanderings. Naturally, ethnography is itself a form of storytelling, the fabric(ation) of which receives special attention throughout a study of narrative.

As I retell other people's stories, I constantly reconsider and rewrite my own story as an anthropologist, and by extension, that of anthropology. This is especially relevant vis-à-vis the contemporary (and urgent) assertion of exclusive indigenous anthropological authority by indigenous peoples the world over, and the call for a complete decolonisation of anthropological methodologies. I would therefore like to emphasise that in this story I do not speak on behalf of Adivasis. In the context of my research, I conceived of my own role, the role of the anthropologist, not as the expert but – without intending to sound partisan – more as a friend, companion, and ally.

The narrative contribution of this research to the field of anthropology itself I see in the following fields. My main intention is to add a unique case study to the anthropological literature, in the form of an in-depth organisational analysis of AMS/ACCORD/JC, i.e. a network analysis of the different constituents in India, the UK, and Germany, and the narrative connections between them. I also situate myself among scholars researching the role of narrative and storytelling in Development processes, and specifically the economics of Adivasi indigeneity narratives. Crucially, I also raise important ethical and political questions about the nature of anthropological authority, and subaltern critique thereof. I therefore seek to foreground critical thinkers from the Global South, both from within and outside of traditional academia.

Finally, in terms of style, this thesis forms a narrative circle (see also the discussion on thesis structure in "Thesis map" below) in line with my concern with connectivity, circularity, and holism (see also in my discussion of methodology in the next chapter "Behind the scenes"). My story thus begins and ends with different versions of the founding story of the Gudalur Adivasis – "The March", and – in a circle of critical enquiry – both the stories and

my analysis thereof come full story circle at the conclusion of the thesis. This circularity I choose to represent in the following way (to be read clockwise):

A critical story

of the Gudalur Adivasis' story. *about how narratives*

and thus the continuation *of Adivasi indigeneity*

to enable tribal self-reliance *are told*

in a mutually beneficial relationship *by Development activists*

to connect people and communities *of a South Indian NGO*

and tribal movement

As a story on stories this thesis draws not only on the stories told by the protagonists, the activists and Adivasis, but also the narratives of other scholars in different research areas. Following, I give a (selective) overview of the main literature I draw on throughout the thesis.

Key literature

In the field "Adivasi indigeneity in India" I consider the major works to be Amita Baviskar's "In the Belly of the River" (Baviskar 1995), Virginius Xaxa's "Tribes as Indigenous People of India" (Xaxa 1999), K.S. Singh's "Birsa Munda and His Movement, 1872-1901: A Study of a Millenarian Movement in Chotanagpur" (Singh 2002), Archana Prasad's "Against Ecological Romanticism: Verrier Elwin and the Making of an Anti-Modern Tribal Identity" (Prasad 2003), Bengt Karlsson and Tanka Bahadur Subba's edited volume "Indigeneity in India" (Karlsson and Subba 2006), Kaushik Ghosh's "Between Global Flows and Local Dams: Indigenousness, Locality, and the Transnational Sphere in Jharkhand, India" (Ghosh 2006), Alpa Shah's "The Dark Side of Indigeneity" (Shah 2007), Ulrich Demmer's "Contested Modernities in the 'Tribal Zone': The Post-Colonial State, Adivasi Politics and the Making of Local Modernity in the Northern Nilgiris (South India) (Demmer 2008), Ganesh Devy and Geoffrey Davis' edited volume "Indigeneity: Culture and Representation" (Devy, Davis et al. 2008), Felix Padel and Samarendra Das' "Out of this Earth. East India Adivasis and the Aluminium Cartel" (Padel and Das 2010), Alpa Shah's "In the Shadows of the State. Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism, and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India" (Shah 2010), Alice Tilche's PhD thesis "In Search of an Adivasi Worldview: Identity, Development and the Museum of Voice in Western India" (Tilche 2011), Daniel Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta's "Becoming Adivasi. The Politics of Belonging in India" (Rycroft and Dasgupta 2011b), and Rashmi Varma's forthcoming book "Modern Tribal: Representing Indigeneity in Postcolonial India" (Varma forthcoming), of which she gave a presentation at Durham University in 2012.

On “indigeneity” Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn’s edited volume “Indigenous Experience Today” (Cadena and Starn 2007) and Sita Venkateswar and Emma Hughes’ edited volume “The Politics of Indigeneity: Dialogues and Reflections on Indigenous Activism” (Venkateswar and Hughes 2012) provided important signposts.

In the area of “(post)development” works relevant to this research include Arturo Escobar’s “Encountering Development” (Escobar 1995) and “Territories of difference” (Escobar 2008), Philip Quarles van Ufford and Ananta Kumar Giri’s edited volume “A Moral Critique of Development” (Quarles van Ufford and Kumar Giri 2003), David Mosse’s “Cultivating Development. An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice” (Mosse 2005), and Rajni Bakshi’s “Bazaars, Conversations, and Freedom: For a Market Culture Beyond Greed and Fear” (Bakshi 2009).

In the field of “narratology” I draw on Robert Scholes’ “The Nature of Narrative” (Scholes 1966), John D. Niles’ “Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature” (Niles 1999), Michael Jackson’s “The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity” (Jackson 2002), Richard Kearney’s “On Stories” (Kearney 2002), Jonathan Gottschall’s “The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative” (Gottschall 2005), and Jonah Sachs’ “Winning the Story Wars” (Sachs 2012b).

Relating to the significance of “narrative in social movements” I consult Francesca Polletta’s “Contending Stories: Narrative in Social Movements” (Polletta 1998), Marshall Ganz’s “The Power of Story in Social Movements” (Ganz 2001), and Joseph E. Davis’ “Stories of Change. Narrative and Social Movements” (Davis 2002).

In the field of “development narratology” I engage with Emery Roe’s “Development Narratives, or Making the Best of Blueprint Development (Roe 1991) and “Narrative Policy Analysis” (Roe 1994), Alex Flynn’s “The Mechanics of Legitimation: An Aristotelian Perspective on Environmental Narratives” (Flynn 2008), Martin Webb’s “Success Stories: Rhetoric, Authenticity, and the Right to Information Movement in North India” (Webb 2010), and Edward Carr’s “The Place of Stories in Development: Creating Spaces for Participation Through Narrative Analysis” (Carr 2010).

*

After answering the “What?” of this story, the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to answering the questions “Why?”, “Where?”, “Who?”, and “When?”, and to providing an outline of the thesis at the end.

Why?

Fieldwork diary, 14/05/2009, Gudalur

How did I come to study self-reliance and Adivasi (tribal or "indigenous") communities in Gudalur/Nilgiris/Tamil Nadu/South India, and their forays into tea production and connecting communities in an international trading network that wants to go "Fair Trade Plus"? And why am I interested in stories?

Maybe because I am not very good at storytelling. Hence my interest in people who are. Such as the activists I listen to on a daily basis. Such as the Adivasis I dance and sing with. For most Adivasis I meet, storytelling is second nature. From an early age they learn to tell stories by listening to their parents and grandparents, to the hoots of laughter from the audience, at a story well told by candle light, to the acoustic backdrop of paan spit hitting hollow bamboo trunks. It is tempting to think of some of the people I meet as the art of storytelling personified.

When I try to tell a story I make beginners' mistakes. I start with the end and finish with the beginning. I accidentally give away punch lines. My sentences are too long and intricate. I slow down and speed up in the wrong places. I even forget to tell the title of the story I am telling, from person to person, as a storyteller would do at the outset of narrating a story to make their audience curious. So they know what the story is about. If I announce to you that I am going to tell you the story of the Mahabharata you will have, if you are familiar with the epic, a rough idea of what it is about, who the dramatis personæ are, even what the different endings are. This allows you to negotiate with the storyteller. What the title does not tell you though, is how the storyteller is going to perform the story.

I love listening to stories, however. Which makes me want to dissect and analyse them, to find out what characterises a good story. Not that this will automatically make me a better storyteller. For the time being, and in this story, I prefer to remain the analyst, the observer, at times the observant participant, on occasions the reluctant protagonist, preferably the person behind, rather than in front of the camera. Which is probably one of the reasons why I am doing anthropological research on stories, rather than telling my own stories, even though my own story is inevitably implicit in this research. Ethnography is after all the act of writing about people, and in extrapolation oneself.

By the end of this story I will have inevitably become a storyteller of sorts, simply by virtue of having narrated my version of the events that happen around me as I spend time with the people I write about, or rather my recollection of it aided by copious notes and bountiful recordings; always and entirely my personal interpretation of the particular reality I experienced, I hasten to emphasise. I will have become a re-teller of the stories I hear people tell here.

Alas, in my eyes this does not yet render me akin to the kind of storytellers I have met here in Gudalur; the mistresses and masters of stories who have honed their craft since childhood and with daily practice. Who thrive on telling a story to different audiences from a colourful array of different cultural backgrounds in as many different renderings. Do I hear you whisper consistency? Truthfulness? In the minds of the storytellers and for the purposes of their stories these are mostly of little essence. They may even be a hindrance to a story well told, or told with a certain intent. They may make perfectly good story material go stale. For myself as a researcher, it is the bending and stretching of these storytelling principles, the permutation of empirical realities through the act of storytelling, the experimenting with boundaries, the hidden and manifest intentions of the stories they try to actualise, or which are thwarted in the process of constant interaction, negotiation, persuasion, and seduction that storytelling is, that are so interesting.

While all this may explain my personal interest in stories as a communication device, I need to elaborate on the purpose of choosing stories as the focus point of my enquiry in this research. It was during the initial analysis halfway through my fieldwork materials, a few months ago, that I realised stories could provide a useful device of enquiry, a frame of reference for answering my research questions. In the field, as an anthropologist, I naturally, and of course dangerously, feel most connected to the (most vocal) storytellers in the community. While, strictly speaking, everyone is a storyteller, I am beginning to distinguish between different storytellers. There are those who tell stories in a specific way, at a planned time, to a particular audience, as part of their vocational role in the community (teachers, elders). There are those who inhabit the border regions between the community and outside, and who are thus in control of negotiating the flow of stories from the inside to the outside, and vice versa. And there are those who offer their stories voluntarily instead of me having to pull them out of people, with at first undoubtedly culturally insensitive and definitely personal questions that, would I ask myself those very same questions I am subjecting people to, I would myself very often be reluctant or decline to answer.
Fortunately for me, I am doing part of my fieldwork in India. The land of storytelling. The land of inquisitive interrogators. The land of 33 million gods and their avatars – and what seems to a non-Indian like myself just as many languages and stories, and their (re)incarnations. The cultural origin of stories such as Haroun and the Sea of Stories. A recurring frame story during my fieldwork, a favourite of the activists, by the way. I wonder why…

Where?

Let us now turn to the main ethnographic setting in Gudalur, Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu.

The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

Gudalur taluk (sub-district) forms part of the Western half of the Nilgiris District, which in turn is part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. In 1980, the Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu were chosen to be India's first biosphere reserve under the Man and the Environment programme launched by UNESCO (Bird-David 1994: 339). According to the 2011 census, Nilgiris District has a population of 735,071. The district is largely tourism and horticulture-dependent, with the main plantation crops being tea, coffee, spices, fruit, carrots, rice, ginger, and eucalyptus. In the Nilgiris, space is above all contested, not only, but especially, since the influx of affluent Bangalorians seeking land for second homes. Most of the conflicts surrounding protected areas in the area are centred around Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (Taghioff and Menon 2010, Thekaekara 2010e, Marcel Thekaekara 2011c).

Nurit Bird-David (1994) argues that the Nilgiris should be studied in terms of two cultural and geographical zones: 1) the Upper Nilgiri region (region N), comprising the Nilgiri plateau (average elevation approx. 1,980 metres) and the eastern slopes of the Nilgiris; and 2) the Nilgiri-Wayanad region (region NW), comprising the southeast Wayanad Plateau (average elevation approx. 910 metres) and the western slopes of the Nilgiri Mountains. It is to Gudalur in region NW, where I conducted most of my fieldwork, that we travel to now.

The Nilgiri-Wayanad Plateau and Gudalur

Map 1 Gudalur. Source: JCUK

Ethnographic interest in the Western part of the Nilgiris, and the Gudalur area in particular, has certainly increased since Bird-David (1994: 340) wrote that

> [s]urprisingly few studies concern the Nilgiri-Wynaad plateau, which lies a dozen kilometers down from the Nilgiri Plateau, on the western slopes, and its tribal groups which include the Mullukurumba, the Bettakurumba, the Nayaka, the Paniya, and the Chetti. Anthropological studies conducted in the latter area, in fact, consist of Furer-Haimendorf's [sic] brief investigation during the summer of 1948, of all the aforementioned five groups;[3] Misra's study of the Mullukurumba in Erumad for the Anthropological Survey of India (1952, 1971, 1972, 1989); and my own study of the Nayaka near Pandalur (Bird 1983a,b; Bird-David 1987a, b; 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992a, b).

[3] To this early source may be added Scherman (1942).

Map 2 Gudalur taluk, Nilgiri District. Source: AMS/ACCORD

Gudalur, at an elevation of 1,072 metres, is both a *panchayat* (local council) town, as well as a *taluk* (sub-district) of Nilgiris District. The 2011 census records the town's population as 43,096. Gudalur's etymological roots are in the Tamil words *kūdal* (joining, confluence) and *ūru* (town, place). According to Adams (1989: 318), Gudalur "finds itself at the confluence of multiple and diverse streams of influence". Gudalur's reputation as being a meeting place, and "at the crossroads", finds expression in its geographical location at Tamil Nadu's northwestern-most tip on the border to Wayanad District in Kerala, thus placing it at the trijuncture of the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. Climatically, it is characterised by two monsoons, the South West and the North East. Commercial crops grown in Gudalur are mainly rice, chilli, bitter gourd, and ginger. Linguistically, "Gudalur represents a microcosm of major Dravidian languages as well as a few Indo-Aryan tongues" (ibid.). The two major spoken languages are Tamil and Malayalam, followed by Kannada, Telugu, Hindi, Badaga, and the tribal Paniya, Irular, and various Kurumba languages. Historically, the region used to be part of the Malabar kingdom.

Demographically, the taluk has been shaped by successive waves of neo-colonisation by Malayalee settlers, from the 1960s onwards after the eradication of malaria, the resettlement of Sri Lankan refugees to the district, and the resulting marginalisation of the tribal population. Significantly, "[m]any of Gudalur's residents admit freely that they moved there as much to escape from constricting demands and expectations from family and traditional associations in their home communities as to improve their economic and social status" (Adams 1989: 333).

The situation today is that "lands to which indigenous groups had free access have now been partitioned into plantations controlled by private landowners, or reserved forests controlled by the state government" (Coelho 2003: 9). For detailed information on how the 1974 Janman Abolition Act affected the tribal *patta* (land title) situation in Gudalur refer to Krishnan (2009).

Ethnohistorically, the Gudalur region has, throughout history, been influenced by the (today politically adjoining) Wayanad region of Kerala. For its tribal people (the Kurumbas in particular), this is a region inscribed with the sufferings of political conquest:

> They invoke their ancestors' role in the Pazhassi *Yudham*, the war of Pazhassi Rajah against the British conquest of Wayanad. In the protracted war that lasted for more than a decade (1792–1805), the adivasis fought side by side with the Pazhassi Rajah using bows and arrows, worked as secret intelligence agents and messengers, provided food and other services to the army, and protected the Rajah by hiding him in secret places known only to adivasis by virtue of their familiarity with the landscape. Thousands of adivasis sacrificed their lives for their homeland. In 1805, the Rajah was killed and Wayanad came under British rule. Many adivasis fled to the forest interiors, fearing British reprisals. These sufferings of their ancestors are recorded in Wayanad history and inscribed in the adivasi social memories, which they invoke to legitimate their land claims in Wayanad. They remember that it was their ancestors who rose up against the British in 1812 to protest against the extraction of high land revenue, while the upper castes – the Nairs and Nambiars – colluded with the British: 'Our ancestors were the ones who shed blood for the Wayanadan soil' (A *Kuruman* activist). (Kjosavik 2006: 8)

It is the tribal people of the region I now introduce in the following section.

Who?

Dramatis personæ

The main protagonists of this research are the group of tribal peoples living in the Gudalur valley, the *Paniya*, *Mullukurumba*, *Bettakurumba*, and *Kattunayakan* (variously spelled *Kattunaicken* and also called *Jenu Kurumbas*) (see below), and, marginally, the *Irular* (Zvelebil 1973, Perialwar 1974, Zvelebil 1979, Zvelebil 1982, Jebadhas and Noble 1989).

Second are the social, community, and human rights activists (organised around affinity groups) engaged with these Adivasi peoples. They are variously called, and call themselves, Development professionals, development practitioners, social entrepreneurs/innovators, etc.

Some of these descriptors belong to a particular age ("community rights and social activists" to the 1960s and 70s, "Development professional" to the more economised 1980s, and "social entrepreneur" to the 1990s onwards). In summer 2009 I participated in the development course "Development from the Inside", run by AMS/ACCORD's founders, Mari and Stan Thekaekara, in Mysore. As a parody of the many hats these activists have worn over the years, the course's participants stitched all these different labels onto a hat for Stan as a farewell present, to be turned to whichever label was required at a given occasion.

My research is then about the interactions between these two groups of people, the Adivasis and the activists (which are overlapping categories), and the rules, views, preconceptions, stereotypes, images, ideas, and prejudices that govern these interactions.

To these two groups I add two other groups with distinct identities that I encountered in the Nilgiris/Gudalur field: volunteers with AMS/ACCORD, and researchers (during my time in Gudalur Daniel Taghioff, Gail Coelho, Oriana Reid-Collins, and Leonardo Niccolai).

The "field" was thus awash with labels (and the need to label myself in order to be able to work within the organisation), and I became very interested in the intersections between these different identities, the fault lines where they overlapped, and how conflicts of interest (not only, but also involving myself) often arose at these junctures, for instance, tribal vs. NGO affiliation, or academic vs. activist affiliation.

Since first becoming an anthropologist, and during fieldwork in particular, I endeavoured to combine and to some extent reconcile what I saw to be two estranged fields, academia and activism. The ever-present tension between these two, concentrated in my own person of the researcher-activist, and my (futile) efforts to resolve these tensions, is thus a recurring theme in this thesis.

Tribal/indigenous peoples/Adivasis

Who are the tribal/indigenous peoples/Adivasis in question? Before concentrating on the tribal communities of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (the Paniya, Mullukurumba, Bettakurumba, Kattunayakan, and formerly also Irular) it is important to situate them, 1) within the debate on the definition of the terms "tribe", "Scheduled Tribes", "Adivasi", and "indigenous peoples", as it pertains to India, and 2) in the wider tribal landscape of the Nilgiris, and among the other ethnic groups of the Gudalur valley. As Kjosavik (2006: 2) testifies, the region has seen an intensification of identity politics and the concomitant (re-)indigenisation of the tribal population:

> The realization that government legislation to restore land claims would benefit only certain adivasi communities has prompted them to engage in a re-articulation of their sub-identities or

> micro-identities by positioning themselves in subsequent struggles as particular communities – as Kurumar, Paniyar, Kattunaicker and so on. This has been achieved by highlighting their differential historicities and attachment to place.

The tribe – Scheduled Tribes – Adivasi – indigenous peoples debate

The central question that sets the tone for the following discussion of the relationships between the terms tribe, Scheduled Tribes, caste, Adivasis, and IP is best articulated by Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011a: 6), who query, "how might one interested in the contemporary articulation of an Adivasi identity be able to engage meaningfully with such problematic terms as 'tribe' and 'aboriginal'?" In an attempt to transcend earlier, racialising Tribal Studies tropes symptomatic of post-independence Indian anthropology, Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011a: 6) advocate a specifically *Adivasi Studies* approach that does not "ignor[e] the relevance of post-structuralist thought that questions the typological tendencies of the nation-state and social construction of ethnographic authority", and allows the possibility of drawing on Indigenous Studies and Subaltern Studies. Furthermore, they encourage engagement with the concept of "de-coloniality", a concept that aims to "recognise, negotiate and move beyond the political and intellectual limits of a colonial/post-colonial patterning". They hope that "[their] reflections can work towards and indeed elaborate the conditions of 'de-coloniality' (Mignolo 2007)".

As I argue in Aufschnaiter (2009: 2),

> Whether the indigenous population of India is called Adivasis, STs or "tribals", either term suggests a unity and homogeneity that is – given India's diversity and vastness – neither existent among "the" Adivasis, nor in Indian society in general. Adivasi communities are geographically dispersed, and socially, culturally, socio-economically, and linguistically diverse.

Thus, one term, such as Adivasi, is never applicable to an entire territory. Rather, one has to look at each region separately (Coelho forthcoming). Also, Adivasi communities have never existed, nor do they presently exist, in a disconnected vacuum. Rather, they have always been, and are embedded, in a web of regional, national and transnational linkages, which bear upon the local actuality of Adivasi lifeworlds. In this context Mosse (2011: 157) highlights the work of

> subaltern historians who have helped overwrite colonial narratives of tribal isolation, marginality and rescue, by examining the way in which Bhil [an Adivasi people in Western India] identity was and is the product of relationships with outsiders, be they colonialists (enforcing systems of taxation and forest demarcation), usurious moneylenders, Gandhian reformers, Christian missionaries or Hindu nationalists.

Similarly,

> [s]ubaltern historians such as Ajay Skaria (1999), have challenged this legitimising colonial narrative of Bhil oppression and rescue (and the development narratives of marginality they

anticipated), by invoking the idea of autonomous 'forest polities' and a 'Bhil raj'. (Mosse 2005: 49)

Adivasi lands have, for instance, been pockmarked by the efforts of multi- and transnational corporations to extract all possible mineral wealth. In collusion with state governments, they are given free rein to wreak havoc, wherever they see possibilities for augmenting their profits. Conversely, Adivasis themselves are today transnationally linked with international organisations, such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and (I)NGOs such as Survival International, the Adivasi Koordination in Germany, the Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network, the Society for Threatened Peoples, Minority Rights Group International, the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests, and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, to name but a few.

Despite the fact that the name "Adi-vasi" is not indigenous to any of the hundreds of Adivasi languages, but is a Hindu collective term for the highly heterogeneous IP of India, it is endorsed and used by most Adivasis themselves, and the activist groups affiliated with them. The name "Adivasi" is mostly used when referring to the different indigenous communities of India collectively, but when referring to the different peoples separately, their names, such as Irular, Gond, etc., are used. Cheria et al. (1996: 62) state that "[o]ur use of the term Adivasi [sic] is an explicit political position, recognizing them as indigenous".

Scheduled Tribes

The term "Scheduled Tribes" is a purely administrative term, indicating those communities specified by the President of India under Article 342 of the Constitution, which is area-specific and designed to reflect the level of socio-economic development, rather than being an ethnic marker. It is used for purposes of "administering" certain specific constitutional privileges and benefits conferred by this status, and for the protection of specific sections of the population considered historically disadvantaged and "backward" (Bijoy 2003, 2008). As Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011a: 8) testify, both the concepts of tribe and Scheduled Tribes, and the latter's constitutionally enshrined administrative frameworks, the Fifth and Sixth Schedule with their Scheduled Areas Advisory Committee and Tribes Advisory Council, respectively, "deny Adivasi autochthony, as contrary to the ideals of shared citizenship and sovereign national territoriality".

Scheduled Tribes do not exactly match all the peoples called "Adivasis". The fluctuation can be explained by the fact that Adivasis appear in more than one state in the census and that, secondly, non-Adivasis, striving for the privileges ST status entails, are listed as STs. Steur (2011a: 61), for instance, cites the example of the "Kunduvadians who were lobbying to

become re-accepted onto the ST list: 'We are not adivasis anymore, but we hope we will soon again be'". The difference in estimated numbers between Adivasis and STs also derives from the fact that many Adivasi communities are not included in the STs lists.

Tribe

Terms such as "tribes" and "tribals", and the administrative term "Scheduled Tribes" express external notions of Adivasis. It is worth noting that, historically, the terms "tribes" and "tribals" are products of late 19th century Western colonial and scientific thought, thus reflecting the patronising and homogenising ideologies of the time. Significantly, as Willem van Schendel (2011: 21) notes though, "[t]hese European ideas were not thrust on an unwilling society. On the contrary, they meshed well with South Asian elites' hierarchical attitude towards people living in forests". He goes on to say that "[t]his is what made 'tribe' such a useful administrative category in South Asian colonial circumstances. It defined groups of South Asians as especially unfit to rule themselves and as natural wards of European colonial officers." Tribe thus became "a term fixing a relationship of very unequal power" (ibid.).

Despite this fact, the terms are still widely used in India (and elsewhere) by government officials and anthropologists alike. According to Kulirani (2002: 116, citing Art. 342 of the Constitution of India (the following passage, however, is not in the Constitution) a "tribe" is defined as,

> an endogamous group with an ethnic identity, who have retained their traditional cultural identity; they have a distinct language or dialect of their own; they are economically backward and live in seclusion governed by their own social norms largely having [a] self-contained economy.

Dube (1977: 5) asserts that it is "best to view tribe as an ethnic category defined by real or putative descent and characterized by a corporate self-identity and a wide range of commonly shared traits of culture", while Sinha (1965: 61) conceives of a tribe "as a system of social relations as well as a state of mind and cultural tradition". Singh (1996: 62) jokingly claims that "when the British took over the country and were faced with a multitude of communities, religions, cultural groups to deal with they simply ran short of vocabulary and the term Adivasi was simply translated into 'tribe' in English".

Skaria (1997: 732) observes that "one can really describe the colonial list of tribes as a process of primitivization, or of the invention of primitive societies". Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011a: 5) confirm that "[u]nlike the close interface between Hindu society and colonial modernity, the 'tribe' typified geographical, cultural and economic separateness, and hence resonated with notions of 'the primitive'". As they say, "[w]hat is significant […] is that 'the

tribe' was inevitably understood within the vocabularies of contrast" (Rycroft and Dasgupta 2011a: 4). Writers sympathetic to the tribal plight (inadvertently) perpetuated notions of primitiveness by championing tribal causes on the basis of their special characteristics: "[L]ate-colonial writers such as Verrier Elwin (Elwin 1992 [1936])(1939), William Archer (1947) and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1948) perpetuated primitivist tendencies whilst seeking to challenge the representational codes of a colonial legacy." For the post-independent nation meanwhile, "[t]heir [dominant nationalist politicians'] civilizing mission was, if anything, more urgent because the Indian nation could not become truly modern until the backwardness of 'tribals' was removed" (van Schendel 2011: 22). Instead of initiating a move to eliminate "primitive" from official language, however, "[b]y the early twenty-first century the administrative view of 'tribes' remained strongly 'anachronistic' and wedded to ideas of backwardness and failed modernity" (van Schendel 2011: 22/23).

In terms of tribal cultures, nowadays "there is an increasing acceptance of 'tribal' cultural practices, provided these are supportive of the nation's self-image as modern" (van Schendel 2011: 27). Despite this, "in the public sphere the 'tribes' remain modernity's opposites" (ibid.), i.e. tribes are no longer characterised by geographical, but social and economic isolation.

In academic discourse, "[h]istorians have insisted that groups now known as 'tribes' or 'adivasis' should be understood not as primitives without history who are in need of catching up with modernity, but as groups whose present powerlessness is the outcome of long, variegated histories" (van Schendel 2011: 22/23). However, "[i]t took functionalist anthropologists time to expose the notion of 'tribe' as a red herring in social analysis" (ibid.). "Susan Devalle (1992) was one of the first to argue in the Indian context that the 'tribe' was a groundless colonial category" (Rycroft and Dasgupta 2011a: 6).

In government as well as academia, we find a worrisome continuity of misconceptions between colonial and post-colonial India: "Despite these conceptual misgivings, the administrative category remains hegemonic" (van Schendel 2011: 24). "The anchoring of the term 'tribe' in the legal frameworks of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal has ossified it by turning a colonial term into a postcolonial identity marker for selected groups whose rights claims *must* be made in the idiom of 'tribe' versus rulers" (ibid.).

Also, "there is no 'tribal' anthropology of South Asia to speak of. Instead, there are several clusters of 'tribal' studies, each of which remains remarkably parochial and (sub)national in scope" (van Schendel 2011: 24) and the "growing scepticism among

anthropological professionals about the analytical usefulness of the term 'tribe' did not communicate itself to official thinking" (van Schendel 2011: 22/23).

As I have argued (Aufschnaiter 2009: 8), "the use of the term with regard to India should always be handled with care and questioned as to its intended meaning, as it often plainly reflects the internal neo-colonialism of the dominant castes, and the Adivasis' status on the lowest rung of the hierarchy that is Indian society." Ultimately, as Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011a: 4) testify,

> one needs to understand the workings of the representation of 'the tribe' not through fixed frames of reference, but as refracting reality through multiple lenses: from departmental agenda, scientific concerns, military requirements, economic imperatives and the personal outlook/stance of individual researchers.

The Gudalur activists are mystified and amused by the theoretical debate in anthropology on the term "tribe". For them it is determined and decided by non-Adivasis, and thus not legitimate. They hold that unless it has practical application for Adivasi development, it is not worth engaging with. If they do engage with it, then it is to change it, as in changing the influence of outdated and discriminating anthropological concepts, such as "primitive tribes", in administrative practice and policies. The activists' championing and strategic use of the term "Adivasi" will be clear by now.

Adivasi

Van Schendel (2011: 27) notes that "in India, the word 'adivasi' is now used widely in contemporary academic writings in English. The reason for this may be that it allows authors to sidestep the conceptual minefield of choosing between the English words 'tribe' and 'indigenous people'".

Bates (1995: 104) compares the Hindi term *Adivasi* to the Latin word for IP, *aborigines*, in order to show that the word "Adivasi" was an invention by political activists in Chotanagpur in the 1930s. He argues that ''the concept of the 'Adivasi' is a product of orientalism'' and of the way ''India over the generations has been remade in the image invented for it by European colonialists''. He goes on to argue that the "Adivasi movement" owes its existence to "colonial prejudice" and that its "modern" claims to "landed property" are a result of the introduction of land titles/deeds by the British as an instrument of control. While his arguments serve to explain the possible origin of the term "Adivasi", and to deconstruct the notion of Adivasis as IP, they do not mirror the term's importance in today's India, and its meaning as an identity marker for Adivasis. Thus, in denying Adivasis their indigeneity and advocating that they should be treated like any other category of Indian

citizens, he makes the same mistake, only inverse, as the British colonialists and Indian lawmakers, who he criticises for having created separate legal provisions for Adivasis.

Whether Adivasis are called tribes, tribals, or actually Adivasis, they still represent the "primitive within" though:

> Not surprisingly, therefore, in a context like India where the Adivasi was burdened with being the image of the real-life 'primitive', their high level of politicization appeared as proof of their characteristic 'primordial' and therefore communitarian role. […] My argument is that it was precisely this culturisation of tribal difference that allowed the double move of colonial-modern politics – mobilizing the 'tribe' in the name of cultural nationalism in order to subsume/discipline it in the name of political nationalism. […] Now, the Adivasi reappeared less as a culture potentially threatening to the system, more as a culture that was itself threatened and therefore in need for protection by the system. […] This new 'almost lost' status through which the Adivasi in India is today sought to be owned up, even as her displacement and impoverishment continues uninterrupted, renders to 'tribes' a very new kind of past-ness, different from the evolutionary past-ness of the nineteenth-century modernization paradigm. If in the nineteenth century, 'tribes' were ethnologised as present traces of past societies, remainders of the past in the present as it were, now 'tribes' are also seen as present cultures that are fast becoming past. […] And since tribes are culture and nothing but culture, this also means that effectively 'tribes' themselves are seen as moving into the past, even as 'tribals' lived on. (Banerjee 2009)

Adivasis have historically tended to reject ways of life that were not their own (unless they could not avoid it and their survival depended on the adoption of surrounding lifestyles). As a result, they became the foil of the essential(ised) other, against which and in accordance with, both those opposed to (colonialists), and those sympathetic (environmentalists, eco-romanticists) to Adivasi ways of life, came to define themselves. Both the civilisers and the anti-civilisers/atavists came to rely on othering Adivasi stereotypes, to define not so much the Adivasis, but themselves vis-à-vis their "chosen" tribes. Adulation and condemnation have been and are never far apart.

Non-Adivasi statements about Adivasis came to be framed in a contradictory manner, e.g. that mainstream and tribal traditions are "deeply intertwined" (Devy 2002) as well as antagonistic. On the one hand, Adivasis are perceived to be incredibly "friendly" people (the adjective most often used in conversation to describe Adivasis to me), to the point of being what could be said to be naively friendly ("innocent" being the favourite infantilising attribute). On the other hand, Adivasis are pigeonholed as inaccessible, not easily approachable – especially by non-Adivasis – and as taciturn, and brooding. "Adivasis have [thus] had to contend constantly with the categorisations of dominant others, whether British officers, Gandhian nationalists, missionaries, bureaucrats, communalist politicians and […] agents of rural development" (Mosse 2011: 158). Unfortunately, "international platforms [tend to] reinforce the essentialisation of adivasis as entirely distinct from other communities" (Steur 2011a: 68).

Steur (2011a: 62) shows "that the adoption of adivasi-ness is more than simple strategic capitalisation of the dominant legal framework for short-term benefits" and Kjosavik (2006: 3) affirms that "[a]n analysis of the adivasi land struggles reveals that their identities were constituted by and are constitutive of the struggles in which they have been engaged. In other words, the adivasi identity is more about becoming than being". Another, related concept that is more about becoming than being, is that of "indigenous peoples".

Defining the "indigenous" and the "indigenous Adivasi"

Both in anthropology as well as in international law, considerable discussion has been going on about the relatively novel, but meanwhile undeniably ubiquitous term "indigenous peoples". In this context, the most contentious issue is whether it can be uniformly used to denote the former "natives", "First Nations", "autochthonous", and "aboriginal" peoples of the world. Especially with regard to Asia and Africa, the scientific debates in the last few years have been particularly vociferous, mostly involving indigenous activist groups, and sympathetic academics, against official government positions. As I have previously argued (Aufschnaiter 2009: 8),

> it has to be kept in mind, however, that the use of certain terms always implies particular perspectives and backgrounds, and often reveals more about the users than those denoted by the terms. Bose (1996), for instance, points out the pitfalls inherent in applying this and other terms to the autochthonous peoples of Asia. According to him, it is impossible to identify any group as indigenous on a chronological basis in Asia because migration has continued for thousands of years.

As van Schendel (2011: 26) cogently argues,

> [h]ere issues of earlier and later settlement are often much harder to establish, partly because of an extremely long (pre)history of mobility and intermingling, partly because theories of historical population movements are contested, and partly because many groups identifying themselves as 'indigenous' are relatively recent social formations.

Today, there is no legally binding definition of indigenous peoples, and most indigenous peoples themselves contest such a definition, as they say it would codify and hence "freeze" their identity at a particular point in time, which does not represent the changing nature of their identities (Aufschnaiter 2009: 8). Nevertheless, several working definitions can be found in the academic literature and in international law, inter alia, in Article 1, para. 1-2 of ILO Convention No. 169, 1989:

> 1. This Convention applies to:
> (a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;
> (b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries

> and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.
> 2. Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply.

In comparison to the characterisation above dating from 1989, the evolution of the term over the preceding decades becomes clear when looking at the definition of "semi-tribal" and "tribal" populations in Art. 1, para. 1-2 of ILO Convention No. 107, 1957:

> 1. This Convention applies to:
> (a) members of tribal or semi-tribal populations in independent countries whose social and economic conditions are at a less advanced stage than the stage reached by the other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;
> (b) members of tribal or semi-tribal populations in independent countries which are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation and which, irrespective of their legal status, live more in conformity with the social, economic and cultural institutions of that time than with the institutions of the nation to which they belong.
> 2. For the purposes of this Convention, the term semi-tribal includes groups and persons who, although they are in the process of losing their tribal characteristics, are not yet integrated into the national community.

Anaya (2004: 3) stresses the factors colonialism and land, which play a crucial role in defining "indigenous":

> Today, the term *indigenous* refers broadly to the living descendants of preinvasion inhabitants of lands now dominated by others. […] They are indigenous because their ancestral roots are embedded in the lands in which they live, or would like to live, much more deeply than the roots of more powerful sectors of society living on the same lands or in close proximity.

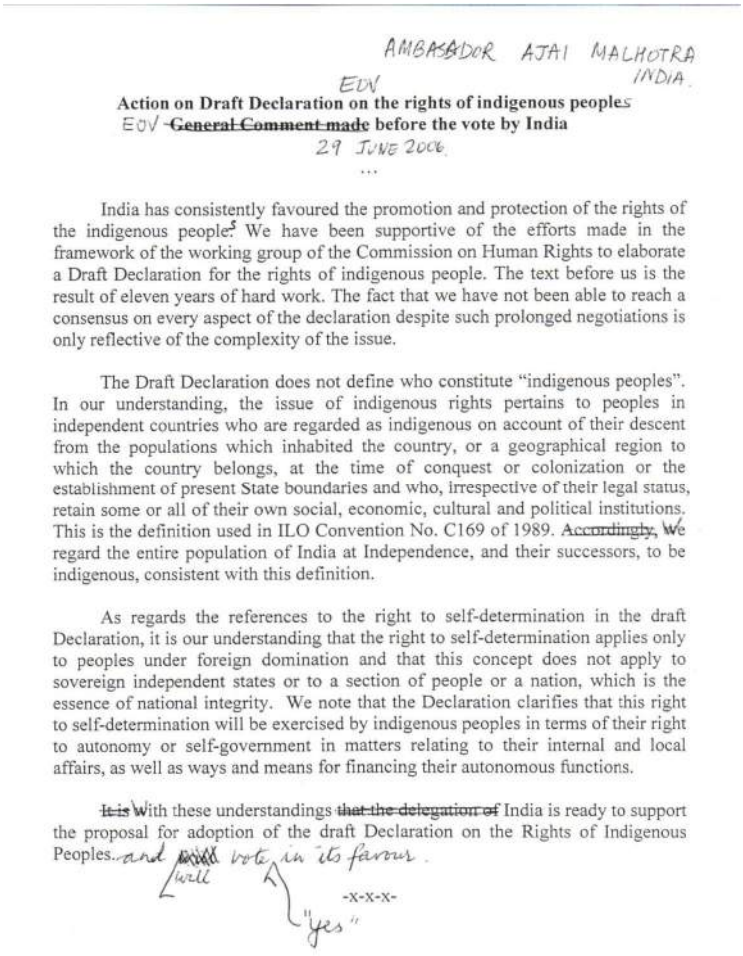
Probably the most-cited working definition is that of Martínez Cobo (1987), in his seminal report "Study of the Problem of Discrimination of Indigenous Populations", submitted to the then UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (now the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights), and later to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations:

> Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.

In this working definition, Martínez Cobo emphasises the territorial connection of indigenous peoples on the three temporal levels past, present, and future. Likewise, Gilbert (2004: 30) stresses the attachment of indigenous peoples to their land as the most important defining factor by referring to the origins of the Greek word *autochthon* – *auto* (self) and *khthôn* (land), meaning "of the land itself". For more on IP in international law, see Barsh

(1986, 1994), Ewen (1994), UN (1994), Stamatopolou (1994), Price Cohen (1998), Pritchard (1998), Wiessner (1999), Stavenhagen (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007), Thornberry (2002, 2005), Mackay (2002), Gilbert (2003, 2006), Anaya (2004), UNSG (2004), Castellino (2005), Castellino and Walsh (2005), Malezer (2005), Perkins (2005), Rodríguez-Piñero (2005), Scheinin (2005), and Swepston (2005).

Significantly, as I highlight in Aufschnaiter (2009: 28), India's official position in the UNWGIP in 1984 was that there are "no indigenous peoples in India and that tribals did not constitute what is understood here by the term 'indigenous populations'" (Stavenhagen 2005: 17). In a response to an urgent appeal made by the then Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the Indian government affirmed this attitude by stating that "it did not recognize any separate category of its citizens as 'indigenous peoples', as there is no internationally accepted definition of an indigenous person" (2005: 18). When the newly-formed Human Rights Council approved the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in July 2006, India voted in favour of its passing, however, on the following grounds:



AMBASSADOR AJAI MALHOTRA
EOV INDIA

Action on Draft Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples
EOV ~~**General Comment made**~~ **before the vote by India**
29 JUNE 2006

...

India has consistently favoured the promotion and protection of the rights of the indigenous people. We have been supportive of the efforts made in the framework of the working group of the Commission on Human Rights to elaborate a Draft Declaration for the rights of indigenous people. The text before us is the result of eleven years of hard work. The fact that we have not been able to reach a consensus on every aspect of the declaration despite such prolonged negotiations is only reflective of the complexity of the issue.

The Draft Declaration does not define who constitute "indigenous peoples". In our understanding, the issue of indigenous rights pertains to peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present State boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions. This is the definition used in ILO Convention No. C169 of 1989. ~~Accordingly,~~ We regard the entire population of India at Independence, and their successors, to be indigenous, consistent with this definition.

As regards the references to the right to self-determination in the draft Declaration, it is our understanding that the right to self-determination applies only to peoples under foreign domination and that this concept does not apply to sovereign independent states or to a section of people or a nation, which is the essence of national integrity. We note that the Declaration clarifies that this right to self-determination will be exercised by indigenous peoples in terms of their right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

~~It is~~ With these understandings ~~that the delegation of~~ India is ready to support the proposal for adoption of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. and will vote in its favour.

-x-x-x-

"yes"

Illustration 2 Paper by the Permanent Representative of India to the UN, A. Malhotra (Sawaiyan 2002)

Revealingly, India has, at least indirectly, according to Ram Dayal Munda (2002, cited in Sawaiyan 2002), one-time chief advisor of the Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP), recognised the existence of IP in India in international fora for the purpose of mobilising international funds, but not for seriously considering the Adivasis' needs (Aufschnaiter 2009: 29). In 1989, for instance, India, along with several other countries, reported to the plenary of the 1989 International Labour Conference on the domestic legal initiatives (for instance constitutional and legislative reforms) it had taken to insure the survival and integrity of indigenous culture.[4] Gilbert (2005: 274) succinctly summarises India's stance on the Adivasis as "a simple case of political hypocrisy that is hiding racism".

In contrast to the various government stances, Adivasis identify themselves as the "indigenous" peoples of India (self-identification being an important factor in determining the status of IP)[5]. The following criteria were formulated by Adivasis themselves (see Bhengra, Bijoy et al. 1998: 4):

- Relative geographical isolation of Adivasi communities;
- Reliance on forest, forest produce, ancestral land and water within Adivasi communities for food and other necessities and the lack of food taboos;
- A distinctive culture which is community-oriented and gives primacy to nature;
- Relatively high status and freedom of women within the society (compared to mainstream Hindu society; Adivasi women are deplorably often seen as "loose" and exploited by outsiders);
- Absence of the division of labour (such as in the *jati*-system[6] in Hindu society);
- Non-existence of the types of caste systems prevalent among several communities in India (not only Hindu): Adivasis largely see casteism as a form of racism because of the unequal position it places them in.
- Absence of the institution of dowry.

Kulirani (2002: 117, cited in Aufschnaiter 2009: 30) derives his understanding of Adivasis from the debate the "Year of Indigenous Peoples" generated in India in 1993. He defines Adivasis as "culturally distinct communities that have occupied a region longer than other

[4] International Labour Conference, Provisional Record 32, 76th Session at 32/12 (1989), cited in Anaya (2004).
[5] This was enshrined in Art. 8 of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 1994: "Indigenous peoples have the collective and individual right to maintain and develop their distinct identities and characteristics, including the right to identify themselves as indigenous and to be recognized as such". It is significant that this article was omitted in the final version of the declaration passed by the General Assembly.
[6] *Jatis* are sub-castes within the four-tier Varna system of Indian society and often correspond to occupational groups.

immigrant or colonist groups" (ibid.). In the same way, he states, Adivasis argue that "by their very nomenclature they were recognized as first dwellers even by the father of the nation [M.K. Gandhi]" (ibid.).

Still, mentioning Asia (and in particular India) and indigeneity in one breath, is accompanied by a certain uneasiness, and a feeling of transgression among anthropologists, sociologists, and members of related disciplines. The altercations about the (non)existence of IP in Asia that have been raging in the pages of academic journals and manifestos of indigenous activist organisations are, however, somewhat counterproductive to the anthropological project. Rather than merely questioning the actual validity of the claims to more or less "indigenousness", I posit that a more appropriate role for anthropology in this regard is the much more rewarding investigation of why the former tribes are now calling themselves IP and, for much of India (except the North-East), Adivasis.

For more on the tribe-Scheduled Tribes-Adivasi-indigenous peoples debate see Sinha (1973), Bailey (1961), Misra (1977), Kulirani (N.D.) and Béteille (1986). Having discussed the categories that tribal people in India today are faced and engaged with, I now turn the focus to the tribal landscape of this ethnography – first, in the Nilgiris and, secondly, Gudalur taluk.

Adivasis in the Nilgiris

Tamil Nadu, the southernmost state of the Indian union, has 1.05% of India's tribal community (Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2014). Nilgiris District is home to only 4% of Tamil Nadu's tribal population, although 26.9% of the district's population is tribal (28,373 people; Tamil Nadu Census 2001). Given its hilly environment, Nilgiris District remained relatively isolated from the rest of the country until the arrival of the British in 1857. Coelho (2003: 7) cites 16 indigenous ethnic groups in the Nilgiris region. Coelho (2003: 3) also testifies to the fact that society in the Nilgiris is divided into separate and often mutually exclusive social circles.

Students of the anthropology of the Nilgiris are familiar with the supposed caste-like symbiotic inter-tribal relationships between the Todas (Walker 1986, 1989) – pastoralists, the Badagas (Hockings 1989b) – farmers, the Kotas (Mandelbaum 1989a, Keystone Foundation 2001, Wolf 2006) – musicians and artisans, and the various Kurumba groups – gatherer-hunters: the Allu Kurumbas, Bettakurumbas, Kattunayakan (or Jenu Kurumbas), Mudugas, Mullukurumbas, Palu Kurumbas, and Urali Kurumbas (Kapp and Hockings 1989). As Bird-

David (1994: 347) points out though, these occupational distinctions and their associated economic activities were by no means exclusive. She conjectures on the extent to which the projection of the inter-tribal system may have been exaggerated by generations of ethnographers by observing that "cumulatively – as Winnie the Pooh in search of the Heffalump – commentators further enriched the 'evidence' for, and the articulation of, the traditional inter-tribal system in Region N" (Bird-David 1994: 352).

Independent of both academic anthropological debates over tribal status, and governmental/administrative classification as Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes, the complexity of the ethnic landscape in the Nilgiris anticipates the contestedness of the mutual socio-cultural recognition as tribes, especially as it pertains to claims and entitlements. What is of interest to me, is who is regarded as tribal (and in most instances, by extension, regarded as worthy of support) by the different activist organisations (not only AMS/ACCORD), since the special status conferred upon Adivasis by Development agencies (foreign ones in particular) goes a long way in securing project funds (international in particular). Simply by way of example, and without wanting to engage in the debate surrounding their tribal status, one such group not regarded as tribal by AMS/ACCORD, for instance, are the Badagas,[7] even though what appears to me more on account of their lack of economic and social marginalisation, rather than an absence of tribal ethnicity.

For further sources of information on the Nilgiri ethnoscape I refer the reader to Hockings (1978, 1989c, a, 1997, 2010), Mandelbaum (1989b), Keystone (2007), Scherman (1942), Lakshmi (1965), Nair (1977), Kapp (1982, 1987), Morris (1986), Kapp and Hockings (1989), Aiyappan (1992), Bird-David (1987, 1992, 1993, 1994, 2004), Varghese and Thekaekara (1994), Anderson (2000, 2001), Raja (2001), Coelho (2003), George Tharakan C. (2003), Kulirani (2003), Norström (2003), Demmer (2006, 2008), Bhanu and Kakkoth (2007), and AMS (N.D.-a).

Adivasis in Gudalur taluk

In Gudalur, the tribal communities live in close proximity and interaction, and part dependence, on the *Wyanadan Chettis* and *Mountadan Chettis* (Thekaekara 2008-09), a non-tribal Hindu community. The latter are not to be confused with the Chettans (who I – to everyone's amusement – once pronounced similarly to "Satan"), another name for Kerala Christian immigrants. Bird-David (1994: 341) argues that,

[7] According to Hockings (1980), the Badagas are descended from farming refugees who fled from Karnataka when the Vijayanagar Empire collapsed.

> the Chetti of the Nilgiri-Wynaad are viewed as an autochthonous land-owning people, while it seems they are composed of a variety of Kanarese [Kannada] and Malayalam speaking peoples who probably gradually emigrated from surrounding areas throughout preceding centuries and encroached on land in the Nilgiri-Wynaad.

In addition to the four tribal communities dealt with below, there are small communities of Toda, Badaga, and Kota in Nilgiri-Wayanad. However, their relationships amongst each other resemble more those of the five main tribal peoples in Nilgiri-Wayanad, than those of their main counterparts in the upper Nilgiri plateau (Bird-David 1994: 341). In terms of tribal settlement patterns, the five groups of the Gudalur region live interspersed amongst each other, with many villages being mixed, thus forming multi-ethnic localities (Bird-David 1994: 342). Socio-economically, Bird-David uses the distinction between gift (region N) and commodity (region NW) economy to distinguish between the ritualised family-based exchange system of the Toda, Badaga, Kota, and Kurumba, on the one hand, and the more mercantile system prevalent in region NW, seen for instance in the exchange of forest produce for everyday items by the Kattunayakan and the bonded labour of Paniyas. Furthermore, region NW is characterised by diverse forms of social organisations, whereas all tribes in region N have tended to be endogamous. Bird-David further draws on the Durkheimian distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity to distinguish between regions N and NW, in terms of the integration of communities within regional systems. Going beyond Nilgiris District (since this is merely an arbitrary administrative unit in a culturally contiguous area), the observation of social hierarchy in the region is not limited to the Nilgiris. Steur (2011a: 61), for instance, describes for the Kurichian and Adiya in Wayanad a similar inter-tribal hierarchy as some Mullukurumba observe vis-à-vis the other tribes in the Gudalur area (Bettakurumba, Kattunayakan, and Paniya).

Competition for tribal allegiance between church groups and sects, NGOs, political parties, etc. is pronounced in Gudalur and the wider Nilgiris. Especially Christian missionary presence is strong in the area. I heard of one case, Putturvayal village, which was divided by the Pentecoastal Church. Another researcher told me of two Christian missionaries from Chennai who had documented the Kattunayakan language for two years and whose aim was to “change their hearts”.

I now give a description of the four member tribes of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam, in their own words. These ethnographic profiles were recorded by AMS/ACCORD staff at the beginning of the 2000s and recompiled by myself during my fieldwork in Gudalur in 2009.

Paniyas

The Paniya community is spread over the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. In Tamil Nadu we are settled in Gudalur Taluk and in Kerala we reside in Wayanad. The Paniyas of the Nilambur region are called Thekke Paniya, the ones of the Kodagu region Vadaku Paniya, the ones of Gudalur are called Mandadan Paniya and Padanattu Paniya, and the Paniyas of Kerala Wynadan Paniya.

We have a famous story about our origins. The first Paniyas are said to have originated from Ippimalai, situated on the border of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Amongst ourselves we speak our own language. To most non-tribals we speak either Malayalam or Tamil, but with the Chettis we tend to converse in the Paniya language.

Most of the Paniya communities were traditionally bonded labourers to the Chettis. Work was remunerated with two to three measures of paddy and cloth on special occasions such as the Vishu or Ornam festivals.

Traditionally, women wore two metres of white cloth tied around the chest. A red or black belt called orumala would then be tied around the waist. Another cloth would be wrapped around the shoulders like a shawl. Some women wear gold, silver, copper or aluminium earrings called kadukan; others mix turmeric powder and lime and apply the mixture to the ear lobe as decoration. Earrings are also made out of the leaf of the Agave plant. Bees wax and the small red seeds of a forest plant, called choodhu mani (kundu mani) are applied to the earring. The women then wear this earring from a young age and keep expanding the hole to fit the earring. Women also wear a necklace, which they make with black, red and white beads called kella.

The men used to wear a mundu reaching below their knees, tied around their waist. They did not cut their hair, though facial hair was shaved using a knife called penakathi or thanvalaikathi. Traditionally, the men wore earrings if they could afford it. A nose ring or stud would be worn only during the koratti nadagam drama.

The Paniya community is divided into many different clans. One clan has relationships with other clans through family ties. The most important relationship in the Paniya community is called pattole, the relationship to the mother's brother. Another integral relationship is bettan, the paternal relationship.

The immediate paternal descent lineage of a Paniyar family all live in the same house. The elders in the community are most respected. The son-in-law also gives a lot of respect to his wife's parents.

Paniya women enjoy a relatively equal status in the community although this is not always apparent. In some places women are the village leader. Women do all the household chores, as well as going to the forest to collect tubers, fuel, and straw. Women can also be oracles. Women are often involved in solving village problems.

In our community, the family property includes land, money, gold and the jewellery and other properties of our gods, the panathali, perambu (cane stick), thudi (drum), cheenam (wind instrument), the karendagam (small container for keeping the lime used for the betel leaf), copper and brass vessels. This family property is divided between the brother, sister and uncle by the elders, Chetty, Chemmi and Koimai. Land is divided between the children.

Marriages are either arranged between families or the bride is stolen by the boy with a small group of his friends. Two other marriage types known to us are love marriage and kaipenna marriage.

Traditionally, seven days after giving birth, in some areas only after 40 days, the woman is allowed to return to her house. When a girl attains puberty, she lives outside for seven or eight days.

When someone passes away, the immediate family tells the elders and then the other relations. On the seventh day the rites are held for the dead person, called pathimoodrin. A big anniversary ritual is also held in April called the kakka pole.

We have our own faith and associated rituals, but in government records we are called Hindu Paniya. We worship the sun, wind, water, trees and rocks, as well as certain idols and stones of particular shapes. We have a belief that in the adi month, the gods and the ancestors bring palm leaves to catch new gods.

Chankirathan, Putheri and Uchar are Paniya festivals.

There are six types of hunting in Paniya traditional knowledge: Mani Nayatta, Kora Nayatta, Wully Nayatta, Eravu Nayatta, Paravai Nayatta, and Olikatti Nayatta. The hunting god is called Nayatta Kulien. Before we go hunting or fishing we pray to this god or another god, Malaipuram Utapan.

The months of July and August are the best time for gathering tubers in the forest. We collect honey in the rainy season and only during the time of the full or new moon. We mainly collect putta thenu. Kuzhithenu is taken during the rainy season and is available for six months of the year. Kordhugethenu and putrathenu are available all year round.

Paniya art is displayed on the houses and temples where the paintings are on the walls. It is mainly the women who are responsible for the art designs, although in some places men also take part.

Paniya men and women have different songs. The two most common instruments used by the Paniyas are the thudi (drum) and the cheenam (wind instrument). They are made by the Paniyas themselves.

Both men and women dance, but separately.

In our spare time, Paniyas love to tell stories. These are told at night time or when work is finished during the day.

In the past, Paniyas were not allowed to enter some non-tribal temples. Paniya relations with other tribals (Bettakurumbas, Mullukurumbas, Kattunayakans) are reasonably strong. We have strong relations with the Chettis, Madadan Chettis and Gounders through our history of bonded labour. (AMS/ACCORD N.D.-f, abridged)

Further information on the Paniya can be found in Kulirani (1983), Marcel Thekaekara (1987c), and AMS/ACCORD (N.D.-f, N.D.-b).

Mullukurumbas

The Mullukurumba name derives from the word Mullu, meaning "original" people. We have many stories of our origin. Today the Mullukurumba communities are settled in Wayanad District, Kerala, where we are originally from, and Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu. We refer to ourselves as Mullukuruman (male) and Mullukurumatti (female).

The Mullukurumba language, which has no script of its own, has incorporated many Tamil and in particular Malayalam words. Most of us write Malayalam. Those groups who have spread into Tamil Nadu also speak and write Tamil. We have been literate for three or four generations. In the past the Ezhuthachens would be called to stay in a village for some weeks at a time and teach the children to read and write.

Most Mullukurumba houses are arranged in small clusters of 20-40 households. Each cluster is called a kudi.

The Mullukurumbas have four clans, venkada kullam, villippa kullam, vadaka kullam, and kadhiya kullam. Marriage and funeral ceremonies are conducted separately by these four clans. Clans are not linked to religions. Children inherit the clan of their mother (matrilineal)

and clans marry exogamously (outside the limits of a clan). Matrilineal inheritance of clans insures that incest does not occur.

Our culture and ceremonies are heavily integrated with the position of the elders in the community. The most revered elder in our community is called the Nattukarnavar, or Talichel. The Talichel controls the four nadus, 1) Packanadu, 2) Karanadu, 3) Kalenadu, and 4) Neriyanadu, and the three kunnus, 1) Kooturkunnu, 2) Edurkunnu, and 3) Madurkunnu. The three kunnus are again controlled by six Muppans. The Muppans are responsible for five or six kudis. The oldest member of the kudi is called the Porunan and he is looked upon as the village head.

Traditionally, men wore a mundu worn just below the knee, as a mark of respect to our Nair employers, with one small cloth over the shoulder. In the past the men also wore earrings made of gold called kadekum. They wore their hair long, but tied it in a knot to the left of their head. Facial hair was shaved.

Traditionally the women wore a special mundu called the kachamuri, with a red line running vertically through the middle of the mundu. Another cloth, maykatti, would be draped over the shoulder and knotted at the left shoulder. Women had ornaments of gold, such as nose rings and earrings (kadela), but no finger rings. They also wore silver bangles, the tholandee and the chembadam.

The Mullukurumbas make a living mainly from cultivation and practicing animal husbandry. We also sell ghee and milk, make and sell handicrafts, sometimes in exchange for paddy and other goods, rather than money. Nowadays many members of our community work on estates and in government jobs. We used to go to the forest very often because many of our household goods, materials, and, above all, food traditionally came from the forest.

The most important form of traditional knowledge preserved in Mullukurumba society is hunting. For bow and arrow we go into the forest and cut bamboo. We distinguish between three types of hunting: 1) Villinayattu (often led by the village elder, the Karanavar), 2) Vallanayattu (an advance party first scouts the forest for animals; the person who shoots the first arrow gets the head and leg), and 3) Muelnayattu (for this the hunters take a big stick and dogs).

When the Mullukurumbas go fishing men and women sometimes go separately, at other times together. They fish in the river and in the rainy season also in the wetlands. Men take a net and rod and women bamboo trays, kortha and chade. Sometimes a substance from the forest is used to poison the fish.

At certain times of the year, when the fruit on the trees are ripe, the Mullukurumbas use bamboo sticks covered in gum to trap birds in the branches of the trees.

When someone wants to build a house, he or she is assisted by members of the village.

The Mullukurumbas have many wedding ceremonies and rules, called aiyve.

We distinguish between four types of marriage: veedumarkam (arranged marriage), mukavai (the girl is brought halfway to the boy's house and handed over to the boy's party there), attumgadaavu, and thottungadavu (these are marriage ceremonies where the girl is stolen from her house).

The ceremony for the coming of age for girls is called therenda kalyanam.

Mullukurumba women participate in all ceremonies and the village elder's wife heads many village activities. The women are not given any kind of dowry to take to their future husband's family. It is said for the women that just like the river always has two banks a woman always has two homes, that of her husband and her parents.

After a child is born the mother and child are made to stay separately under an awning built for them. If it is a male child, an arrow is placed in the shed, and if it is a female child, a sickle.

In the past, few people went to the hospital when they were sick; instead we practiced herbal medicine. Our traditional medical knowledge includes treatments for asthma, injuries, fever, bone fractures and headaches. The latter is treated with a leaf called tulassi, which is ground and applied like a compact to the head. Coughs and colds are treated with an infusion of pepper and dried ginger whilst burns are treated with chicken fat.

If someone in the kudi dies, the men of the kudi first inform the dead person's relatives. This is called the chavu parayel. Then the dead body is kept in the daiva pura. After everyone has arrived the body is removed from the daiva pura and bathed. The body is then taken to the burial ground, where the head is placed towards the south and the legs to the north.

The death rituals are called pole and can be done either on the third, fifth, seventh or ninth day after the death and burial. The day of the death rituals, called kootathu kootal, is the day the dead person's spirit is sent to join the rest of the spirits. On this day all the funeral attendees once more come together in the dead person's kudi. At night a feast is held.

Our gods do not have a form (the temple in Erumad does not have idols). The names of our gods are Athiralan, Kandambili, Kalimalai, Malampuliyan, Arivilli, and Velakelyappan. In addition to these we also worship our dead elders as gods. Each kudi has a separate god.

We celebrate Putheri, Mandilam, Uchar, Vishu, Karkadaku Pathinallu, and Onam festivals.

We paint on the walls of every house and during weddings girls paint the village temple. For these paintings red and white mud and soot are used. Blue is used in the temple.

Men practice two types of dances, vattattam and kollattam. Women practice a dance called kaykottikelli during festivals. Dancing is usually accompanied by singing. We only use tapping sticks as musical instruments, which are solely used for the men's korkalli dance.

The stories we like to tell at night and at free times during the day include the Nayattakatha, Pandrikatha, Koolenarikatha, Ramayana, and Mahabharata. Both men and women tell stories as well as riddles.

Previously, it was considered terrible for Mullukurumbas to touch a Paniya, Bettakurumba or Kattunayakan and we would be expected to have a bath afterwards. The Mullukurumbas practiced agriculture on their lands as well as doing sharecropping. The Chettis leased out their wetlands to the Mullukurumbas. Because of the sharecropping the Mullukurumbas have always had relations with non-tribals. (AMS/ACCORD N.D.-e, abridged)

Further information on the Mullukurumba can be found in Marcel Thekaekara (1987b), AMS/ACCORD (N.D.-g, N.D.-a) and Misra (1971).

Fieldwork diary, 01/12/2009, Gudalur

Talked to KTS (Mullukurumba) about change and continuity in marriage rituals while typing up Anita/Lalitha's cultural documentation, one of four, on the Mullukurumba. The key point he emphasised, is that all these rituals do not exist in codified form, hence they are always open to change. Different people will celebrate them differently; some people may forget some elements or add new ones – in short, they are characterised by continual change.

Bettakurumbas

Bettakurumba communities can be found in the states of Tamil Nadu (Nilgiris District), Kerala (Wayanad District), and Karnataka. Our community is believed to have originally lived on a mountain range called the Vollagamalai in Karnataka. The community in the Gudalur valley of Tamil Nadu is spread over settlements in the areas of Pattavayal, Erumad, Ayyankolly, Devala, Ponnani and Sri Madurai. Our tendency to live in hilly terrains and on higher ranges is reflected in our name – Betta (hills) Kurumba. By the other communities in the region we are, however, called by a multitude of names – evidence of our strong relationships with our tribal and non-tribal neighbours. Amongst ourselves we refer to each other as Naanga Maghu.

We speak our language only within our community, and in the past, anyone who spoke a foreign language within their village had to pay a fine to the elders.

The names of our clans according to region are:

Name of Region		*Name of Clan*
Sigur	-	*Pambar Maghi*
Koomamoola	-	*Attankaal Maghi*
Manalkoli	-	*Elthara Maghi*

The names of the seven households (tharavads) are:

Cherumudi	-	*Devarsholai*
Paakane	-	*Paakane Keeri*
Ellamanna	-	*Keeri*
Naduvaayi	-	*Mudirakolli*
Manalkolli	-	*Keeri*
Kellathi	-	*Cherambadi*
Gundumelu	-	*Cherambadi*

The names of the valions kunnu (hill territories) are: Ezharatharavadu, Aarutharavadu, Mornutharavadu, and Anj Ali (naadu).

Our family unit is nuclear. Family property is usually divided equally among the children. Bettakurumba society is broadly divided into two sub-divisions (moieties), into which the various clans are grouped. The members of different clans belonging to one group can intermarry with those of the other group, but marriages within a group are not allowed (exogamous marriage organisation). Every village has a clan that is "sovereign" and thus performs all the rituals.

Women are respected in Bettakurumba society, although this is not always obvious. Women are not allowed to participate in religious functions.

We know two types of marriage – arranged and love marriages. When a Bettakurumba boy wants to marry a girl his parents and the elders of the village go and see the girl. In some places the groom's family gives money (kanapanam) to the bride's family. The amount is usually 12 panam (1 panam=75 paise). Love marriages only take place when the boy and girl elope without the consent of the parents.

When a woman is pregnant, the husband often takes charge of some of the domestic chores such as the collection of fuel wood. Before delivery a tent or an outhouse is constructed into which the woman moves before giving birth. The woman returns to her house nine days after the birth.

When a girl attains puberty she goes and stays in her relative's house for thirty days.

When a village member passes away the bereaved inform the village elders. When the relations arrive, the village elder, Mopadhuthu and some other village members go to the burial site and dig a grave. Once this has been dug, the body is bathed in water mixed with turmeric powder.

After either seven, nine, or 26 days the same relations come together again and participate in a further ceremony.

Cultivation is very important for the Bettakurumba people. Cultivation only starts after the elders have initiated it, which is always after the Vishu festival. We cultivate ragi, samai, kambhu, and nellu. Kumbalam is a practice where people share the work while dancing and playing musical instruments. Other sources of income are animal husbandry and the manufacture of handicrafts. We are famous for our different types of baskets, the muram, kudai, and komai.

Before going hunting men from the village meet at the temple and place some money as offering to the gods. Bargi, ambu, kathi, kambi, and kayarukani are the traditional hunting tools.

Men, women and children all go to the river to fish. First betel nut and leaf and tobacco are placed on the river banks as an offering to the gods. Then the fish are poisoned using kardekai, seevakai pattai, kalakole cheddi, and narenge kodi. As a fish trap we use a type of basket, the chadai.

For trapping birds we either use a sticky gum prepared from the sap of the jackfruit, athi, kozhi maram and sesame oil, which is then heated and spread on bamboo sticks, or catapults and bamboo basket traps called adichal.

For digging tubers the sharpened branches of the karai maram, cheegai maram, bamboo, or panai maram are used.

In Bettakurumba communities it is the Vinjikalan (god man or oracle) who administers tribal medicine. Traditionally, stomach and leg pain, headache, throat pain, mouth ulcers and neck boils were the ailments most often treated with these medicines.

Bettakurumba life used to be heavily integrated with the forest, which provided us with all our materials. During the summer season, we would leave our villages for a month and go and stay on the river bank. This, we believe, kept sickness away. If someone fell sick in the village at any other time, the community shifted to a new site.

The construction of Bettakurumba houses is accompanied by a ceremony. Our houses are small, but beautifully built. The buildings are constructed using bamboo, ropes from forest vines and straw, which are collected around the time of the full moon. When a household member passes away, the house is demolished and a new one built in its place. Bettakurumba houses have a veranda where people spend a lot of their time. The temple is built by the elders of the village. Nowadays it is difficult to access materials from the forest for house construction, which is why the Bettakurumbas have become dependent on the government to provide housing.

We play a flute called kuzhel made from the roots of the jackfruit and rosewood trees. The thaval or thambattu is a kind of drum made from the hide of the Sambhar deer.

Traditionally, the men wore a white mundu draped around their waist, falling down to their knees. They wore their hair long, but were not allowed to keep beards or moustaches. The oracle would tie his hair into a small knot called a kudemee.

The women traditionally draped a white sari around their chest and knotted it at the front. One of the most striking Bettakurumba body ornaments is a special beaded hairpiece called a kunjilam or enment worn by the women. The long leaf of the agave plant used to be dried, rolled and worn as an earring. Some women wear a special beaded chain of 25 paise coins as a symbol of marriage.

Our women have practiced tattooing for many years. For this the sap of the paragum, kanal marem and aathi marem forest trees, soot from cooking pots, the leaf juice of the avarai creepers and breast milk are mixed together and left to stand for three days. After this a design is pricked into the skin and the prepared dye spread over it. Traditionally, many women tattooed their face to mask their renowned beauty, which was often done specifically

to deter estate owners. Some women, on the other hand, believed that tattooing enhanced their beauty.

Among other festivals we celebrate Putheri during which we bring paddy sheaves from the temple and tie them to the front of our houses. (AMS/ACCORD N.D.-b, N.D.-f)

Coelho (2003: 9) writes that

> [t]he Bettakurumbas have largely given up their old lifestyle as forest gatherers who practiced some shifting-cultivation, and have acquired a different "traditional community occupation" as elephant trainers or mahouts. The British had, during the last century, embarked on a large-scale operation to convert tropical rainforests in the area into teak plantations, in addition to tea and coffee plantations, for which they used elephants for transportation in the jungle and to clear trees. The Bettakurumbas and Jenu Kurumbas were the two primary groups in the Nilgiris who were recruited to help clear the forests, and they were taught the practice of capturing and training wild elephants. Although wild elephants are no longer captured, a semi- domesticated herd of elephants is still maintained by the government forest service and is used for light work in forest management.

Kattunayakan (Kattunaicken/Jenu Kurumba)

The Kattunayakans are settled in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. In Kerala we live in Wayanad District and in Tamil Nadu in Gudalur Taluk of Nilgiris District in the areas of Pattavayal, Padanthorai, Erumad, Ayyankolly, Devala, and Sri Madurai. Migration to the Gudalur valley has taken place from Wayanad and Karnataka. We are believed to have originated from the Cheeramudi Hills of the Cherangode area of Gudalur Taluk.

Traditionally, most Kattunayakans lived in the forest and from this we derive our name, kadu, meaning forest. Related to this is our origin story:

One day a man was walking through the forest when he met God. The God gave him some bottle gourd seed. The man took the seeds home and planted them. One of the bottle gourds that came up was abnormally large. The man plucked this gourd and stowed it away safely in his house.

One day a big flood came over the land. The man took out the big gourd, cut out a door in it and put his two children, a boy and a girl, in it.

The water rose and rose, drowning the whole world. Only the gourd with the two children stayed afloat. Then God played the kuzhel (a traditional Kattunayakan wind instrument) and the water started drying up.

After many days the gourd was washed ashore and the children came out of the gourd. From then onwards many children were born. Then God met the brother and sister. He offered them paddy in one hand and ragi in the other and asked them to choose one. They chose paddy, but God gave them the ragi instead, which is why this grain is a very important food for the Kattunayakans. The brother and sister then lived in the forest, which is how the Kattunayakans came to have such a close relationship with the forest.

To this day the gourd is very important for the Kattunayakan people. It is, for instance, used as a rattle during our religious ceremonies.

The Kattunayakans are divided into different groups, viz. Jenu Kurumber (honey collectors) from Karnataka, Moosa Kurumber (supposedly monkey eaters), and Thekanaiker (also known as Achanayakar) who live in the forests of Nilambur in Kerala.

Other communities call us by different names, depending on whether we are addressed directly or talked about indirectly.

Tamil and Kannada words have long been integrated into our language, which has no script. Amongst ourselves, we only speak our own language, but converse with others in the foreign languages we know.

In the past we made our living from the forest although some were also bonded labourers. Nowadays we do coolie work in Kodagu, Mananthavadi, and Calicut, others work on estates or work in government jobs in the forest or working with elephants. Those who have land cultivate it themselves. We cultivate paddy, ragi, and samai. Tubers are one of our most important food items.

When hunting with bow, arrow, and dogs the men usually go in groups of 10-15. Before the hunt the elder prays to the Gods, Nayattakulien, Echee and Ethan, and offers tobacco, betel leaf and areca nut to them. When an animal has been caught everyone gathers around and assists in building a fire. The meat is then shared equally among the hunters. One share of the meat is offered to the Gods.

Hunting with a knife and spear is only done during the monsoons, but not when the rains are heavy. During this time animal tracks can be easily spotted. If the men spot the tracks of a porcupine, they follow it to its burrow where they light a fire inside it. The animal chokes on the smoke and is forced to come out of hiding. As it charges out, it is shot at with an arrow. The meat is again shared equally.

Small birds are usually shot down with a catapult. For hunting giant squirrels we use sticky gum applied to the end of a stick, which is pushed into the squirrel's hideout.

For hunting birds we use the same method as the Bettakurumbas using traps.

All the people of the village, men, women and children, go fishing together. We identify a pool in the river which holds a lot of fish. Then a small dam is built and the pool drained. If the pool is too large and cannot be drained, plant toxins are used to narcotise the fish.

For honey collection we usually set out in groups looking for hives. We prepare ropes from the bark and trunk of the keyni, vendai and chakade trees. One of the elders offers a prayer to Ethan, Echi, Varadhan and Kulien. Offerings include a live chicken, betel leaf, coconut, areca, tobacco, incense and money. If the hive is on a very tall tree, a ladder is crafted and tied to the tree by means of ropes. When smoking the hive and driving out the bees with a torch everyone sings a particular song called the thenupattu (honey song). The honey is then stored in tins and taken home. If hives are situated under very high and steep rocky outcrops, a rope is let down the rock, with a wooden plank at the bottom for the honey collector to perch on while he swings down from the top of the rock.

Usually two or three families live together in one house. It is the father's task to divide the family property.

Our community consists of many clans that are divided according to the geographical areas of Pattavayal, Ayyankolly and Erumad; Chembakolli; Packana; and Gudalur. The way Kattunayakans address each other is determined by these clan relationships.

Every Kattunayakan community has an elder who has different names in different villages, for instance, mudeli, ethan, mudien, jemann, and karnapadu. The elder is responsible for many ceremonies and village activities, including weddings, funerals, pujas, and the ceremonies around harvest time. Elders seek to solve any problems in the village.

Marriage is only permitted between maternal, but not paternal cousins. If two clans come together in marriage and experience problems, these clans never come together in marriage again. When a boy wants to marry a girl, either his father, uncle and village elder, or sometimes the mother go to the girl's village. Those who have had a love marriage are punished by the elders. Problems in marriage may end in divorce. Some divorcees marry again. If a husband's wife dies, he sometimes marries her sister.

When a Kattunayakan girl attains puberty a separate tent is built in which she stays for either one or three months.

Three days after a Kattunayakan woman delivers all her clothes are washed. Mother and child stay in a separate room. After the sixteenth day the woman gives her child to the village elder's wife. On the day the woman comes home incense is burnt and a knife placed in front of the house. Before entering the house the mother and child cross this seven times. The name of this day is kalamtoddel, which literally means that the woman restarts her domestic work.

Women are involved in all village/community work and also participate in all ceremonies. Some women become oracles and are possessed by the Gods. If a widow has a son, she stays in her husband's village, however, if she has a daughter or is childless she returns to her family's village.

When a member of the village passes away the relatives are informed, who bring new clothes. The body is bathed in water and turmeric powder. The dead body is carried around the grave seven times before it is lowered into it. After seven days a ceremony called karumundran takes place. This involves seven or sometimes only four bundles of food: three of white, three of black, and one of yellow food. The funeral party stands on either side of the grave and takes turns in throwing the food across the grave, catching, and eating it.

We know many herbal medicine treatments, as traditionally we have always lived near the forest. We know treatments against stomach pain, for hand and leg injuries, and asthma.

Traditionally, men wore a mundu just below the knee and a small shoulder shawl. Hair was worn long and facial hair was shaved. Earrings called kadiken or a small piece of root of the kani plant were pierced through the ear lobe.

Women also wore a mundu just below the knee, with another cloth, called serlaiudukattathu, tied over their left shoulder. The women also wore traditional earrings of the olei, which were decorated with small plant seeds.

Tattooing is popular in our community. This is done using a needle and a dye produced from the juices of the avarai leaf and black soot.

Most Kattunayakan houses are plastered with white mud and then bordered with red and black coloured mud. For the daiva veedu (village temple) the colours mentioned above and in addition blue and yellow are used.

Kattunayakan men have two dances, neetakali (nadthiattam) and sutten, which are danced during festivals and fairs. Some of the older women dance along with the men. Women have a dance called the kumiadthu. We play three types of drums, mara (virare), thambattai, and thanum. We also have a wind instrument called the kozhel. We sing four types of songs, uvupattu, devapattu, aattupattu, and thenupattu. Popular stories told at night time include Pandri, Kullanari, Kurengu, and Nande.

We have our own priests, oracles, and separate temple. Our Gods' names are Muthapan, Marimma, Kulien, Kortan, Muttenmarr, Karliuthon, Chinemari, Dhothemari, Guredevamar, Echi, and Ethan. We worship the wind, rocks and trees.

We attend many fairs in our area and of our own temple. Putheri is the most important festival for us. We did not traditionally celebrate Ornam, but because we have for some time lived in the proximity of people who do, we started to observe the occasion.

Our relationship with non-tribals has always been defined by our position as employees and bonded labourers – an unequal relationship. The Chettis never allowed the Kattunayakans into their houses or to drink from the same well. Among the other tribal communities we have the strongest relationship with the Mullukurumbas. We are held with some amount of fear and respect by our neighbours because we are believed to have magical powers. (AMS/ACCORD N.D.-d)

It is mainly the Kattunayakan who are renowned and feared by other tribal and non-tribal people for their alleged sorcery skills. Bird-David (1994: 343) asserts that the "Nayaka in the

Pandalur area, for instance, related that at the beginning of time Nayaka pairs lived scattered throughout the Nilgiri-Wynaad area, and the scattered local groups of the present were descended from them". On the Kattunayakan connection with sorcery she states, "[i]n contrast with Region N, in Region W it was held that Nayaka behaved like animals – as opposed to turning into animals" (ibid.).

Further information on the Kattunayakan can be found in Marcel Thekaekara (1987, 2009), Bird-David (1989), Demmer (2006, 2008a), on their honey hunting practices in Keystone Foundation (2001a, 2006, 2007, 2008), and their egalitarian political organisation in Bird-David (1994: 346).

Having discussed the Adivasi peoples of the region, the focus now shifts to the other remaining actors in the field: NGOs, researchers, and volunteers.

NGOs

The organisation(s) I engaged with are chiefly ACCORD (Action for Community Organisation, Rehabilitation and Development) and AMS (Adivasi Munnetra Sangam) in Gudalur, and subsidiarily, Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation (TAF), Coorg Organisation for Rural Development and National Adivasi Alliance (CORD/NAA) in Karnataka, and Neethi Vedi in Kerala.

The AMS has its origins in the endeavours of ACCORD, a Development organisation based in Gudalur, Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, started by two social activists, Mari and Stan Thekaekara, in 1984. ACCORD sought to radically change the livelihood situation of the local tribal communities from being landless, seasonally employed (and in the case of the Paniya even bonded) labourers to becoming self-reliant tea-growers and farmers. AMS/ACCORD has meanwhile proliferated into a plethora of different organisations, detailed in the chapter "Stories of Adivasi self-reliance".

While AMS/ACCORD does not represent the entire tribal population of the Gudalur valley, for the sake of fluidity, the geographical denomination "Gudalur" is used synonymously with AMS/ACCORD in this thesis.

The researcher cum volunteer

The recruitment of volunteers in AMS/ACCORD relies largely on the reputational capital of the activists, testifying to their foregrounding of human relationships. Accordingly, Mari was constantly engaged in efforts to draw "bright young" volunteers to Gudalur, away from what she perceived to be the money-making machineries of Bangalore and other big cities.

The activists hold an ambivalent view of anthropologists, as testified by Mari's (Marcel Thekaekara 2008d) article on the peskiness of researchers: at the same time despised and valued; a nuisance, but referred to for data. Anthropologists are divided into two camps: the favoured ones, who preceded the activists in the Nilgiris (the ones they turned to in their quest to understand the different tribal groups), such as Nurit Bird-David and Francis Kulirani, and the less favoured ones who came after. Furthermore, anthropologists were categorised according to whether they were pro- or anti-Adivasi, although criticism of the latter was mainly directed at the outdated notion of colonial anthropology unfortunately still present in India. As I learned, NGOs are not too happy about researchers going into the meta-level to question their philosophy beyond NGO-internal review mechanisms. This, and the fact that researchers' ideas of valid research do not match up with communities' (and the NGOs more or less monopolising their representation), is discussed extensively in the chapter "Behind the Scenes". Personally, I was highly uncomfortable with the knee-jerk categorisation of researchers according to their particular social class, ethnic and national origin, and even skin colour. The disadvantages of being a "foreign" researcher I felt on a daily basis.

One of the easiest ways to connect with people was through song and dance. Being a singer and guitarist myself, I relished the chance of participating in, and audio- and videorecording Adivasis' songs and dances. People in turn connected more easily with me by requesting that I sing for or with them, or teach them a particular song. In Vidyodaya, AMS/ACCORD's school, I thus quickly took on the role of leading the singing activities following the morning assembly. It was this immersive, people-led approach, and the adoption of, and adaptation to multiple roles (volunteer, researcher, friend, secretary, anthropologist, singing teacher, translator, English tutor, Tamil student, etc.) that allowed me the most comprehensive access to people's lives.

When?

I examined these different participant groups during different time periods, either first-hand or second-hand. I have followed AMS/ACCORD's work since my first visit to the organisation in February 2007. I spent time with them first-hand from July 2009 to June 2010, and have been following them online, via email, skype, newsletters, and facebook since then up to the present. I started following JCUK during my time in India 2008/09, and became involved first-hand after my return to the UK, from June 2010 up to the present. I have been following the Adivasi Tee Projekt second-hand since my time in India, including meeting one of its members there.

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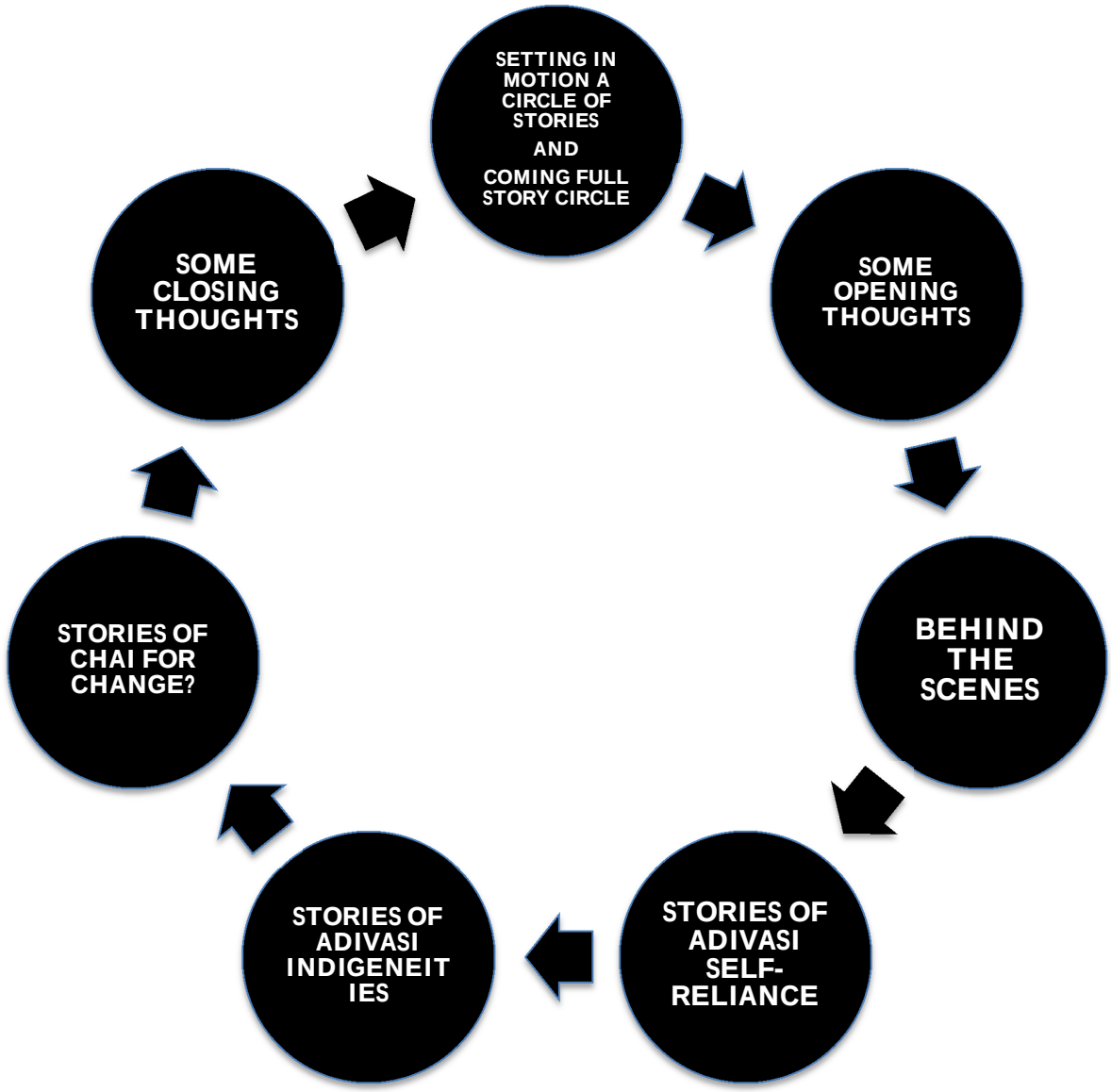
Having provided the thematic, geographical, as well as social and cultural coordinates of this thesis in Part I, I conclude this first chapter in Part II with a brief rationale of the thesis structure and an overview of the chapters.

Part II

Thesis map



Essentially, as pictured in the thesis map above, this story/thesis/research is conceptualised as a circle – as pertains to both the concept (the narrative structure, the anthropological theory), and its execution (the research and writing up process). Symbolically, this story therefore does not have an artificial starting or end point, even if it practically has. Its "components" constantly interweave, segue into, and blur each other's temporal and spatial boundaries. Each

part of the story is cyclical in itself, while forming part of the greater story cycle. Even though this is hard to represent in a linear work such as a thesis, I chose the symbol of (potentially an infinite number of) frame tale-style narrative circles, within a circular story, in order to represent several different aspects I consider important.

These are, inter alia, the infinity, unfinalisability, and unfinished nature of any story, since stories are akin to living creatures, constantly reproducing themselves as long as there is a medium to retell them. This research is hence only one among many stories about the people it deals with, and stakes no claim to being an authoritative account. At the same time I recognise the responsibility of every storyteller for her or his creation. Connected to this is the fact that this research builds on many foregoing stories and will, most likely, be followed (even if not necessarily in turn be built upon) by many others.

The chapters

Following the preceding what, why, where, who, and when in this introductory chapter, the thesis continues with an exploration of the methodological toolkit that helped assemble this story, in the next chapter "Behind the scenes – methods and tools". In this chapter I, in the self-reflexive vein, demonstratively write myself, the storytelling anthropologist (a tautology?), and thus my own story as it played out simultaneously alongside the "Chai for change?" story, into the narrative. I do this so as to shatter any possible illusion, on the part both of the anthropologist and the audience, as to the invisibility of the ethnographer. This demonstrates the liminality of the storyteller, her or his positionality both within and outside the story, and her or his role as the mediator (or interpreter, or however one prefers to conceive of the narrator) between the narrative and its recipients. By doing so, I also seek to highlight that stories are ineluctably a reflection of their human creators. Even though stories are created in an attempt to impose an artificial order on chaotic experience, every story (many stories in the case of this research), and its retelling, are always a multiplicity of different things simultaneously: a story co-authored by an abundance of (partly) audible/visible/tangible and (partly) inaudible/invisible/intangible voices, partly the storyteller's own creation, and partly the recrafting of other's work (by copying, rephrasing, etc.). Stories are, by nature, repetitive, chaotic, and inchoate, and always contradictory and contested.

The chapter "Behind the scenes – methods and tools" is followed by the first ethnographic chapter, "Stories of Adivasi self-reliance". This deals with the evolution of AMS/ACCORD's

Development agenda for tribal development in Gudalur, in theory and practice, leading up to the emergence of the community trading network "Just Change".

Next comes the second ethnographic chapter, "Stories of Adivasi indigeneities", the aim of which is threefold: firstly, to trace the development of Adivasi indigeneities in India. Secondly, to investigate, on the one hand, the influence of global indigeneity discourses on Adivasis in India, and on the other, the production of Adivasi indigeneities in the global arena, and the resulting emergence of the "cosmopolitan Adivasi". Thirdly and finally, I examine how these different Adivasi and other indigeneity story threads meet in Gudalur. I demonstrate how activists there hybridise these diverse (and often divergent) indigeneity narratives, in order to harness them for various social movement and Development ends, to build the organisation's economic self-reliance agenda.

In the analytic chapter, "Stories of chai for change?", I take up the two narrative threads of tribal self-reliance and Adivasi indigeneity from the two previous chapters, explore their intersections, and scrutinise the different activist notions of Adivasi indigeneities and their problems. I do this by comparing them to contemporary post-indigenous tribal realities in Gudalur. I then call into question the economics of indigeneity behind the Development concept of "indigenous self-reliance".

Finally, in light of indigenist rhetoric's anachronistic problematicness, I advocate a rewriting of the Gudalur Adivasi indigeneity narrative, to take into account contemporary Adivasi intersectionality – understood as the intersection of the multiple forms of discrimination Adivasis face, in the concluding chapter "Some closing thoughts – telling another story of Adivasi intersectionality…".

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Audiovisual postscript

At this point it is time for the first of the audiovisual narratives of this thesis that accompany and interweave with the text. We embark on a narrative journey loop of image and sound from the UK to India and then Germany, and back to the UK again:

Just Change, A new leaf: http://vimeo.com/18423265

Geraldino visits Vidyodaya Adivasi Study Centre in Gudalur:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wjs6hWMa6WQ

Danny Bent: Velo Love – a journey from London to Chembakolli, Gudalur, by bicycle:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IvztklXH_8

Adivasi Tee Projekt: Lehmbau am Adivasi Haus, Pfälzer Wald, Germany:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PipsCmiF9c

Sabita Banerji, Just Change UK: From Gudalur to Greater Leys housing estate, Oxford:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CG66XGR03o

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Interlude

For the following chapter, "Behind the scenes – methods and tools", I, the researcher-storyteller, emerge from behind the scenes and consciously write myself into this thesis.

BEHIND THE SCENES – METHODS AND TOOLS

"An admirable line of Pablo Neruda's, 'My creatures are born of a long denial', seems to me the best definition of writing as a kind of exorcism, casting off invading creatures by projecting them into universal existence, keeping them on the other side of the bridge… It may be exaggerating to say that all completely successful short stories, especially fantastic stories, are products of neurosis, nightmares or hallucination neutralized through objectification and translated to a medium outside the neurotic terrain. This polarization can be found in any memorable short story, as if the author, wanting to rid himself of his creature as soon and as absolutely as possible, exorcises it the only way he can: by writing it."
Julio Cortázar, Around the Day in Eighty Worlds

Chapter map:

Part I

Fieldwork and learning

Part II

Reflections on writing – across boundaries

Part III

Epistemological considerations

Prelude

In this chapter I first of all, in Part I, introduce the ethnographic methods developed during fieldwork in Gudalur and the UK, and discuss the insights born out of fieldwork, before turning the spotlight on my writing up approach in Part II. In conclusion, in Part III, I discuss some epistemological considerations that have guided my research on Adivasis throughout its evolution since 2003.

Part I

In Part I, I first describe how I "entered" the many fields of this research and, secondly, learned that "fieldwork is not what it used to be any more". I then relate how this initially led to shipwreck and my subsequent embracing of chaos. Out of this experience were born, fourthly, observations on research methods, and, fifthly, insights on working with and doing research in an NGO setting.

Fieldwork and learning

In this thesis, I, the ethnographer and narratress, largely remain behind the scenes. This is in line with my preference as a photographer to stay behind the camera. For this chapter, however, I write myself into the story. This introduces some of the chaos that has given birth to this story, which – for the sake of intelligibility – I try to tame in the other chapters. This I do in order to represent how I as the ethnographer experienced the research process.

Thanks to the primacy of method in anthropology, the *how* is of as much interest as theoretical frameworks and research findings. How do we gain access to the people we pester with our questions? How do we entice people to tell us so much about their lives? How do we arrive at conclusions about people's lives fashioned from observations recorded during the time we spend with them? In this chapter I trace the evolution of my methodological approach and share the lessons that may be of value for others. Many of these insights have only come to me in the months since the "official" conclusion of fieldwork. It goes without saying that I wish I had had this level of insight prior to starting fieldwork, however, there is a grain of truth to the cliché that roads are made chiefly by travelling. It is to the different "fields" of this research that I now travel.

Both my ongoing professional and personal interest in Adivasi issues, and my initial PhD research interest in the influence of indigeneity, environmentalist, legal, and ecogovernmental discourses on Adivasi resistance strategies against displacement from their ancestral forest land, have come a long way since 2003 and 2008 respectively, with many twists and turns on the way. In the course of ricocheting off the walls of these different research canons, it has changed, proliferated, and diversified as much as the Adivasi ground realities, and the attendant discursive flow of Adivasi narratives I have studied for this research.

Thanks to its subject matter, anthropological research is as much a personal, as well as a scientific journey. By way of tracing the personal history of my engagement with Adivasi issues, I would like to chart how I arrived at the research focus of this thesis: the localisation of indigeneity discourses in a South Indian Adivasi Sangam, comprised of and representing five tribal communities, viz. the Bettakurumba, Mullukurumba, Kattunayakan, Paniya, and, marginally, the Irular, and their endeavours of internationalising the Adivasi land rights struggle, by trading the tea grown by them through an alternative global trading network called Just Change, which seeks to directly link disadvantaged communities in mutually beneficial economic relationships.

Entering field(s)

Much like the frame tale narratives within the narratives (within the narratives and so on) I disentangle throughout this thesis, I conceive of my research as a field within a field. That is, I research Adivasi indigeneity discourses through their narrativisation, performance, and enactment by an NGO. NGOs thus form the prime loci for the concept(ualisat)ion and dissemination of Adivasi indigeneity narratives in this thesis.

I first came in touch with Adivasi issues during a so-called "intercultural exchange" trip to South India in summer 2003. High on the agendas of the NGOs we visited were land rights and women's issues, microfinance schemes (before they fell from grace), child labour (e.g. in the fireworks factories of Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu), and other human rights issues. I returned in 2007 for my Master's dissertation fieldwork. This research sought to explore the nexus between Adivasis in India, and international and national legal discourses, uncovering the (ir)relevance of international human rights law for indigenous people, on the one hand, and national law on Scheduled Tribes, on the other, for Adivasis (Aufschnaiter 2009). Both realms had experienced recent boosts at the time. Both in India and globally, indigenous rights activists, indigenous and non-indigenous, were claiming, albeit partial, victories. After decades of frustrating negotiations and campaigning, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples came into being on 13 September 2007, and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act was passed on 18 December 2006.

During the 2007 fieldwork I visited, among other NGOs, for the first time AMS/ACCORD in Gudalur, on the "Kerala" side of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu. In terms of my research as well as personally, this turned out to be a watershed. Talking to Stan Thekaekara, one of ACCORD's founders, completely changed my outlook on my research issues, approach, and above all methods. He severely criticised the fact that outside researchers tend to zoom in on communities, instead of communities devising, leading and conducting their own research for self-empowerment. He criticised the fact that I did not have concrete plans at the time to publish my findings in Tamil and Malayalam.

My original intention, prior to commencing the PhD, was to combine ethnographic fieldwork with work in an indigenous organisation, since I had received a warm welcome, despite often difficult circumstances, from most organisations, both in 2003 and 2007. I also knew which organisation I wanted to work with, AMS/ACCORD, but harboured doubts whether they would accept me back as an anthropological researcher, since during my brief visit in 2007 Stan had laid out to me in no uncertain terms his unfavourable opinion about

one-sided, exploitative research that only benefits the researcher's career, but not the community. It was this attitude, and the pervading rhetoric of self-reliance, which seemed to permeate all of AMS/ACCORD's work, that intrigued me the most. Like many a visitor to the organisation I was fascinated. Here were an organisation and a movement that were trying to change the way Development was done. Their philosophy seemed to be revolutionary, their methods unconventional, and their results impressive. Either they were exceptionally good at selling themselves or there was really more to it; that this was the first people-led movement I had personally come in touch with that was not merely hot-air NGO-talk. Needless to say, I was hooked and wanted to know more.

At the time, Adivasi forest rights issues and in particular forest rights conflicts, thanks to the recent passing of the groundbreaking Forest Rights Act 2006, were high up on my PhD agenda. I was interested in the links between indigeneity and environmental (and in particular forest) governance, IP, and protected areas. The research question in my original research proposal (see Appendices 6 and 7) was "how the variables 1) external and internal discourses of indigeneity, 2) recent legal developments, 3) discourses of popular and scientific environmentalism, and 4) practices of ecogovernmentality, influenced Adivasi responses to land alienation, and in particular their resistance strategies against displacement from their ancestral land and forest". I was intent on exploring recent confrontations between Adivasis and the state, in the form of the Indian Forest Department, in the areas in South India where I had previously conducted fieldwork. At the time of my last visit to the area in February 2007, the Forest Rights Act had just been passed (29 December 2006), but the accompanying Rules would only be written into law a year later (1 January 2008). The Adivasi activist organisations I interviewed back then for my MA dissertation research had just begun to translate and disseminate the act. No one could tell yet whether it would become a real people's tool for tribal land rights recognition, or whether it would once again fall prey to its own shortcomings, like so many preceding legal instruments regarding Scheduled Tribes,[8] and claims would drown in bureaucratic quagmire.

It was then that I came across a poster at Durham University advertising a course called "Development from the Inside" (DftI) in July/August 2009, co-organised by Charities Advisory Trust London and a collective of Development professionals and NGOs in South India, consisting of two weeks of lectures and sessions with local activists on current Development issues and project visits, and two weeks of project placements. This course was

[8] and Castes, since they had until recently been treated as a unit, legally speaking, e.g. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

run by no other than the original founders of AMS/ACCORD. It seemed an opportunity made in research heaven.

Indeed, the course location, the participants, the convenors, in short, the entire programme turned out to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Apart from consisting of an excellent programme of lectures, exposure visits, and placements on international Development in a local South Indian setting, it provided me with the much-hoped-for entry point to working with AMS/ACCORD. During the course, luck was on my side. Mari, Stan's wife, like him a seasoned social activist and campaigner, and a journalist, was looking for a volunteer to work on a project to set up an Adivasi cultural centre in Gudalur. From an approach that was still very much grounded in the "about them" ideology, I was quickly converted to a "with them" approach, which convinced me to work with Mari on the project to develop an interactive centre for indigenous cultures, at the time named "Ippimalai[9] – The First Peoples' Place".

Having weathered a rather peculiar one-month Tamil course near Chennai, I headed back to the Nilgiris. When I arrived, the forest rights issue turned out to be a hot and very popular topic, with the Nilgiris already over-researched and -saturated with researchers such as myself. Thankfully this meant that the background to the forest rights struggle in Mudumalai I had researched during my first year in Durham was a very useful primer for working with AMS/ACCORD. Eventually, this aspect of their work moved to the back of my own enquiry though, as, instead, issues of Adivasi culture and indigeneity, in the form of the planned cultural centre, and self-reliance and trade justice, in the form of Just Change, came to the fore.

In a sense then, although naturally not the way I had planned it, I managed to realise my original PhD fieldwork plan of working for a project involving Adivasis, while simultaneously conducting research on an initiative that was trying to tackle social injustice and global economic inequality.

Fieldwork diary, 30/08/2009, Chennai

It is the procedural and practical aspects and challenges of fieldwork particular to a post-colonial (with reference to overseas imperialism) and neo-colonial (with reference to the present-day marginalisation of indigenous peoples and the exploitation of their natural resources) setting that I am grappling with the most. Since arriving in the field, meeting up with fellow researchers working on similar issues, and especially since completing the DftI

[9] *Ippimalai* is considered in Paniya folklore to be the mountain of their origin. Paniyas, when startled/excited/or surprised, exclaim "ippi". This reference to their ancestors, they claim, gives them courage (Stan Thekaekara, personal communication, 1 Dec. 2009).

course, many of my research premises have been seriously challenged and many of my initial assumptions turned on their head, leading to a reassessment of my research goals, and the rephrasing of some of the core questions. This will no doubt continue over the course of the coming year in the field.

In addition to my primary fieldwork site in Gudalur I kept a base in Thalavadi, Tamil Nadu, about a two hour bus ride away from Gudalur, with my "Indian family", S.M.A. Viennie, Chitra, Yuvana & Poo, and the children & teachers of the hostel and school they run. Their hospitality and love offered a personal respite from the pressure cooker that Gudalur sometimes was. Research-wise, the many discussions and visits to other Adivasi organisations (chiefly TAF-Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation), and their meetings with Viennie, provided me with a much-needed alternative take on the world of South Indian tribal NGOs.

My experiences with other researchers simultaneously present in the region during the times I was in Gudalur were mixed. They ranged from rather unpleasant, competitively coloured one-off meetings (without a desire for their repetition for these reasons), at which I was expressly told 1) what the research questions worth researching in the region were, 2) given the feeling that the region was (rightly) already oversaturated with both Indian and non-Indian researchers, and 3) that I would therefore inevitably be encroaching on other people's already established and hard-won research turfs. Prior to my return to the Nilgiris in July 2009, I had already been warned by C.R. Bijoy, a seasoned activist, that the area was positively teeming with FRA researchers. I usually managed to remain neutral by emphasising the fact that my study was limited to AMS/ACCORD and Gudalur, a region relatively "untouched" by researchers, inter alia because of AMS/ACCORD's endeavours to keep the region as "outside researcher-free" as possible.

Thankfully, there were then also very cordial relations with other researchers, some of whom became fast friends during the respective times we shared in Gudalur. On the whole, my relations with these other non-hostile researchers/friends were conducted on a much less formal level than the one I maintained with anyone affiliated with AMS/ACCORD, since their external position allowed for different types of personal relations and information exchange.

Tarsh Thekaekara's (Mari and Stan's son) reflections from 2009 echo my own findings upon arrival in the Nilgiris that year, on the contested terrain of Adivasi activism:

The thin dividing line

Till about a year ago I lived a peaceful, quiet, contented life. I taught maths and science in a school for Adivasi kids and was interested in wildlife in my free time. The kids all liked me and I liked being with them. The hardcore wildlife conservation people (I'll call them the extreme right) and the few forest officials who knew me thought it was a good thing. And the extreme human rights lot (the extreme left) did not know about me, and those who did also thought it was a good thing.

Then for some reason I thought it was a good idea to try to get people from the community document some of their indigenous knowledge and incorporate it into a curriculum. This could not be done a classroom, and involved elders from the villages actually taking kids into the forest. Then there was this problem that they were not officially allowed into the forest. But there was a forest rights act (FRA), and this should not have been the case. I had a friend working on tracking the forest rights act at the national level, and thought it would be a good idea to get her to come over and find out what needed to be done. Many of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam people were then given an overview of the Act, and I also went around to some places to talk about the Act.

I wrote about the neutrino project in Tehelka, Infochange, New Internationalist and The Week and scored some points with the extreme right.

I wrote a blog about the FRA and got in touch with more people working on implementing it and scored some points with the extreme left.

Neither knew about my interest and activity in other sphere. Then Mudumalai became a Tiger Reserve, and the two spheres interacted with each other – and not smoothly!

My parents were close enough to the left, and so I got someone from the right – the Field Director of Mudumalai – to talk to representatives of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam. What was this Tiger Reserve all about? Both sides were briefed about the other to make sure it did not become a big fight. Small sparks did ignite, but nothing caught fire. The AMS decided they did not want to protest the Tiger Reserve.

So I fell out with the extreme left. They began taking pot shots at me. Public speeches about how I was getting money from the forest department. NGOs were getting money only because the Adivasis were badly off, so it was in my interest to keep Adivasis in servitude. Even the intelligentsia of the left indulged in mud slinging from a safe distance. Researchers were told I was almost beaten up by a group of tribals in Masinagudi for working with the department.

I then got more active on implementing the forest rights act. Its the honey season and I push to make sure people are allowed to collect honey even from the critical tiger habitat. Helped arrange a meeting on the FRA at Ooty with the decision makers. I started pushing the department to arrange classes for all their staff on the FRA.

And I fell out with the extreme right. That fellow is just like his parents. He's only bothered about tribal rights, and is masquerading as a conservationist. What does he know about wildlife? He has a degree in physics and teaches tribal children. Just because he's written some articles he thinks no end of himself.

Mudumalai continues to be a big issue in cyber space (though its no longer an issue on the ground once Gudalur was removed from the Buffer Zone). So researchers are zooming in. All armed to the teeth with extreme left information from cyber space. I am well covered in mud before they even get here. Firangs [foreigners] *who do not have a clue about what India is are becoming experts on intricacies of Mudumalai. I am thanked for being honest, though I cannot figure out why I would be otherwise. I am asked what exactly I am gaining from all this. It seems no one does things unless there is personal gain.*

It made me think though. What do I really gain from this? I have no clue.

What I do know though, is that I am just a pawn in this whole process. Both the left and the right attribute too much to me. In the bigger picture I have done nothing significant in any

sphere. Adivasis will continue along their destined path and tigers will meet with their destiny. Maybe if I work all my life on this I can make a small dent in both destinies, but for now it is completely insignificant.

We did not start the fire. It was always burning. Since the world's been turning. We did not start the fire. No we did not light it. But we tried to fight it.

But the kids still like me, and I keep that interaction going. I felt a very real and immediate satisfaction last Saturday when Subin, Dhanesh and gang all mastered their venn diagrams and set theory.

This week we'll do quadratic equations. (Thekaekara 2008-09)

I thus found that "fieldwork is not what it used to be" (any more), or what I had previously been taught and experienced in the region. This led me to, first, adapt my previous fieldwork methods in order to be able to study both the changed landscape of Adivasi activism in the Nilgiris, and an Adivasi Development NGO in depth, and, secondly, by extension, it led me to reassess anthropology's assumptions about "the field".

"Fieldwork is not what it used to be"

Both our notion of "the field(s)" and the way we do "field(s)"work are changing (Faubion and Marcus 2009). Based on my PhD fieldwork experiences, I would like to identify a few factors why they are changing, and what the arising challenges are.

1. Everything is speeding up. The notion of studying something in-depth and long-term, in order to properly understand how it works, and why it works in particular ways, has been superseded by the need to produce ever more research output, speed up information flows in a bid to outrace competitors in the (academic and non-academic) information economy, and increase individual "research impact". This automatically requires participants/players in this game to progressively adapt their output/publication speed, leading to changes in a) the choice of research methodology approach(es) (e.g. the emergence, proliferation, and subsequent preference for spot-check methodologies such as Rapid Rural Appraisal), b) the preference for publication types (preference for articles over monographs or edited volumes, and increasingly open-access journal articles over closed-access journals for their quicker turnaround time), and c) the quality of research in general (we are constantly increasing the amount, but not necessarily improving the quality of information).
2. Increased connectivity, and concomitant increase, and finetuning of the control of information: The way in which people are communicating with each other is changing fundamentally. For one, we do not need to be in each other's physical presence any more to "do fieldwork". Theoretically, I do not need to be in India to receive the latest news of what AMS/ACCORD choose to share with the world (after it has passed their self-

representation filters). The paradox I encountered during fieldwork was that I often learned a) more and b) very different things from AMS' online newsletters than I did from my conversations with different people on the ground in real time. This had different reasons. People have differential access and thus levels of information in NGOs. Information gatekeepers such as Manoharan, AMS/ACCORD's late secretary, for instance, inhabited a privileged status in the organisation's internal information economy. There was also an intentional and unintentional control of information flows in AMS/ACCORD – on the one hand, between the different key AMS/ACCORD players/the different AMS/ACCORD sub-organisations (according to current personal internal dynamics/animosities/allegiances), and, on the other hand, between AMS/ACCORD and the wider world (other NGOs, the government, donors, friends and enemies, etc.).

What we are seeing then, are, on the one hand, more diversification and, on the other hand, greater control of communication channels in anthropological "fields".

3. Partly as a result of this, we see a shift towards more reduced-carbon/"green" fieldwork, i.e. a preference for phone, skype, email, facebook, etc. for fieldwork communication methods, and bike, pedes, etc. for fieldwork transportation.

As a result of the discrepancy between how I had "planned" fieldwork, and how it eventually panned out, I, at first, foundered – humungously.

Shipwreck

> "*But you only learn the unknown rules when you break them. In my dialogues with over 20 anthropologists, all but one switched focus in the field. They responded to what they encountered rather than sticking to prior hypotheses to be tested at all costs. Fieldwork did not and cannot go to plan. There are creative discoveries to follow through. Agar's (1980) open-ended 'funnel' remains the most productive approach. Do not filter in advance.*"
>
> Judith Okely (2009)

This research is then an example for how everything turns out differently than planned:

Fieldwork diary, 31/08/2010, Durham

The past year of nine months of fieldwork and three months of recovering from illness, has been a profoundly humbling and instructive experience. Predictably, things turned out very differently to what I had carefully "planned" during the academic year 2009/10. Having arrived at this point, I feel I both have and have not accomplished the goals I set out to achieve at the end of Easter term 2009. What I had not expected was just how MUCH my research would change during this year.

I realise now that, despite my previous research experience in India, what I had set out to do in my progression script last year was too ambitious for someone not native to either India, the multitude of its languages and ethnic groups and, above all, its indigenous cultures, and

for someone not sufficiently accustomed to the subcontinent's kaleidoscopic multilinguality and multiculturality.
Tamil being such a regionally specific language and classical Tamil being a purely scriptural language, I would now strongly recommend learning local, colloquial Tamil wherever possible, for the simple reason that English allows one equal access to the elites as pure Tamil, but not to the colloquial Tamil-only speaking population.
With hindsight I thus feel I should have spent at least a year in the field either prior to starting the PhD or prior to field research, in order to get to know the organisation, the people, and the issues I intended to work on in the field, and to learn Tamil, Malayalam, Bettakurumba, Paniya, Mullukurumba, and Kattunayakan to a better level than I did.
Another aspect I had not expected to differ this dramatically from my original plans was fieldwork location. What I had initially envisaged to be a network ethnography of different organisations working with or set up by Adivasis, quickly turned into organisational anthropology with one organisation/movement (luckily the one I had wanted to work with all along): AMS/ACCORD in Gudalur, Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu.
I also realise now how, almost above anything else, the people one chooses to work with – especially if one is initially dependent on them for cultural and linguistic interpretation – and their ideological leanings, determine the outcome of one's work. For this insight, I am glad to have decided to work with AMS/ACCORD this time, instead of S.M.A. Viennie (with whom I worked in 2003 and 2007) and the Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation (TAF) he advises. This, even though I had sincere offers of support from him, participated in several TAF events in Aug./Sept. 2009, prior to moving to Gudalur, and a deep bond of friendship meanwhile connects me with Viennie's family. How differently the fieldwork would have turned out if I had worked with him, I cannot tell. I did keep in touch with what was going on at TAF while in Gudalur and regularly visited Viennie in Thalavadi, also Tamil Nadu. Since I was personally acquainted only with members from organisations that Viennie knew, it came as a bit of a surprise to me, just how deep-seated the antagonisms and ideological differences are, especially between AMS/ACCORD and other organisations (let alone researchers, which I touch upon later). I was not aware enough, how much my situating myself in one camp would handicap and even prevent my access to others.
Was it a mistake then to choose AMS/ACCORD? Yes and no.
I knew, prior to starting the PhD, that the founders and non-Adivasi staff of ACCORD represented (at least in their own reckoning) the elite of social activists campaigning for Adivasis in South India. I also knew that some of them harboured a hostile attitude towards researchers, for various reasons (the foregrounding of Adivasi empowerment, the extractive and exploitative nature of research, cultural and linguistic barriers, research saturation in the Nilgiris and on Adivasis, to name but a few). I thus had a hunch that it would not be easy to gain their trust and I knew that, especially as a foreigner, I would have to approach them differently to how other researchers had approached them in the past, and that I would have to come up with a research designation and purpose that suited them. What I had learned from seeking access to NGOs in the past was that conventional modes (email, post) produced conventional responses (rejection, ignorance, avoidance). Instead I had to approach them differently by increasing my financial and symbolic capital that was of possible interest for them.
Part of the appeal of working with them was that I shared their ideals and aspirations to create more reciprocal research relationships and community-based research opportunities. Part of my motivation to do a PhD was, in fact, to have the opportunity of engaging in a more collegiate research effort than my MA research had been and to do this with AMS/ACCORD.
Returning to evaluating the past year's fieldwork, if I was to summarise my experiences with AMS/ACCORD, I would say they do not lend themselves (for the aspirant anthropologist) to

just “hanging out” with or doing participant observation. By choosing AMS/ACCORD, I entered a space where being a researcher came loaded with an entire gamut of negative preconceptions, and was highly contested. I have meanwhile learned that this attitude does not extend to researchers from within the fold of the AMS/ACCORD family. I eventually became a researcher for them by being invited to work on the culture project and train two Adivasi youngsters to become curators for the culture centre.

Admittedly, my confidence in my own abilities as a “barefoot anthropologist” was rather diminished when I returned from fieldwork because I did not think I had managed to bridge the gap between activism and research very well. I perceived myself to constantly be at the centre of a tug-of-war between the “old” anthropology and a new form I could possibly be following, or developing, by perceiving the people I was working with not merely as collaborators, but as colleagues. I hoped that training Adivasi youngsters as curators and researchers would be one way of realising this collegiate approach (rather than just collaborative). In the way of this, however, stood the realisation that anthropology, and especially the practice thereof in the form of a PhD, are essentially Western concepts. These are, according to the activists, in conflict with most of the fundamental tenets of tribal cultures, such as, for instance, the respect for wisdom and experience acquired through age and life experience, as opposed to knowledge acquired through a degree, even though, in the context of modernity, the latter counts more. Or the value accorded to the sharing of information or knowledge by everyone in the community, for everyone’s benefit, not just for oneself and one’s career aspirations.

The past months have thus seen serious soul-searching. Helpful guides along the way were Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples”, James Faubion and George Marcus’ “Fieldwork is Not What it Used to Be: Learning Anthropology’s Method in a Time of Transition”, and Norman Denzin et al.’s “Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies”. I have come to the conclusion that research and representation of indigenous peoples are incredibly sensitive issues.

Embracing chaos and getting out of your own way

> *“I tell you: one must still have chaos in one, to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: you have still chaos in you.”*
> Friedrich Nietzsche (1885)

Conducting fieldwork is a peculiar business. Successful fieldwork depends on many factors, such as health, climate, and personality. My original fieldwork plan, and how I eventually “conducted” fieldwork (or it conducted me), ended up differing enormously. From previous experience, I knew that elaborate fieldwork plans tended to founder pretty quickly when they encountered India’s tendency for unpredictability and serendipity. One of the issues, for instance, that initially affected the research (from a purely Western perspective), during the inevitable transition period before “going local”, was the constant load shedding, which often saw electricity cut off for most of the day.

This volatility taught me to allow myself to be guided by “the field”, and choose an exploratory research approach, rather than trying to overdetermine the direction I was heading

in. Inevitably, I would arrive at my desired destination by circuitous, rather than straightforward routes. Still, looking back, my methodology was initially set in pristine white marble, a bar set much too high, a colossal edifice I mistakenly thought no amount of fieldwork disasters could topple – in theory. Fortunately, precisely these "unplanned" debacles almost immediately did. From then onwards my methodology embarked on a much healthier path of creatively adapting to, and flexibly making the most of circumstances in an essentially uncertain environment. This led me to adopt a more Taoist approach of "going with the flow". This of course implied the danger of getting lost, so the need arose for defining life buoys that would not fail to anchor and return me to the themes, and the relationships between them, I had set out to research, viz. self-reliance and indigeneity.

More than anything else, this "failure" to implement my original proposal kickstarted a very salutary search for the reasons thereof. I came away from fieldwork with a clear sense that there was something fundamentally wrong at the systemic level, i.e. not only at the heart of the issues I had worked on, such as Adivasi land rights, trade injustice, women's rights, etc., but above all with my methodology. I now turn to an overview of the methodological insights born out of these adaptations in the field and the methodological toolkit thus honed in the field.

Reflections on research methods

> "*The impression given of anthropological work is that it is a rather long-winded device for keeping innocent people up all night talking.*"
> Jonathan Spencer (1989: 157)

Research design-wise, this research presents a single-case, (largely) embedded case study. The methods used were participant observation and observant participation, narrative interviews, semi-structured interviews with key people on an appointment-basis, excavation of documentary data from organisational archives (in AMS/ACCORD's case grey literature was of particular importance), "research by doing", i.e. project work within the organisation, and hours of informal conversations. I concur with Bernard's (2011: 157) observation that "in some kinds of research, informal interviewing is all you've got".

Interviewing was subject to what I would term the anthropological equivalent of the uncertainty principle. As Grills (2008: 31) observes,

> [s]imilarly others have argued that a 'researcher's role is always partial' and interviewing is 'not like a chemistry science experiment, the researcher's mere presence produces changes in the data we are trying to observe' (Oakley 1981: 30-59). Indeed, a researcher's map of consciousness is influenced by his/her unique mix of race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality, and religion. This in turn influences what data is extracted and how it is interpreted.

Accordingly, my different identities, in no particular order, as a woman, Austrian, Adivasi researcher, singer and singing teacher in Vidyodaya, etc. influenced my interactions with people, and thus the research.

The need to circumnavigate people's research fatigue, i.e. activists' frustration with being asked very similar questions again and again, by a continuous stream of visiting researchers (invited and uninvited), taught me to be creative in how and when I approached people. Meal times became the most important occasions for informal conversations and "catching up". The three shared meal times in the canteen with the junior doctors from the hospital, ACCORD office staff, and occasionally teachers were particularly instructive times of the day, as they allowed people to recount and reflect the day's experiences outside of their familiar settings. At the same time, a more or less steady stream of people from outside the organisation, such as myself, asked unfamiliar questions at these occasions, thus causing some of the most popular stories to be retold again and again, in different versions for different audiences. I also learned the perks of being a chai wallah, i.e. getting to attend meetings one would not normally be invited to or welcome at, by serving tea there. Lastly, becoming/being a researcher was above all about developing and eventually having the confidence to act like a researcher.

I also quickly learned to differentiate between (officially) espoused (especially in an organisational setup such as an NGO) and observed behaviour. These differences usually came to light when they concerned events NGO staff wished to keep under wraps, such as failed marriage attempts or marriage break-ups – both taboo subjects. In this context, Rizvi (2008) points out an important role anthropologists often find themselves playing in the field, i.e. that of a quasi-counsellor. This is an observation I can corroborate.

From my own experience, I can also confirm Grills' (2008: 30) reflections on consent forms:

> Interestingly, fully informed face-to-face consent was perhaps less ethical and less culturally appropriate because rejection of a white, foreign, medical professional would cause a loss of face […] Despite explaining that the signature was for their protection, many perceived it as disempowering. They felt signing meant they were foregoing their right to the interview data, surrendering their control over the interview, and promising to tell the truth.

The notions of "truth" and "reality" are two problematic concepts in a polysemantic context such as an NGO environment.

Polysemy

To set as an anthropological goal the attempt to represent "reality" as truthfully as possible is highly problematic. It leads into the cul-de-sac of defining what "reality" is, when in fact

there exist as many "realities" as there are people willing to define reality for themselves. Accordingly, it goes without saying that an ethnography, like any form of representation, presents a particular construction of reality, one of the many competing ones. How is knowledge then produced in a polysemantic environment, such as, for instance, Gudalur? Two fieldwork diary entries demonstrate this:

Fieldwork diary, 21/03/2010, Gudalur

Attended an after-performance party and dinner at Mari and Stan's following the Chembakolli performance of the Darpana Dance Academy. Deceptively, it at first felt a bit like Adivasis performing for the development elite. Chathi was centre-stage for most of the evening. He revived a theatre form called *koratti nadagam*, which originally belonged to the plains, from where it was brought by the Chettis. A Chetti taught it to a Paniya, as a result of which he faced sanctions because Paniyas were serfs to the Chettis.
What the performers actually did the whole night was to tell jokes in a musical form, mainly ridiculing the establishment (the "hidden transcripts"). Stan then went on to tell the story of how, once, visitors from the UK filmed such a performance of this musical joking. During the performance, the Adivasis started ridiculing the foreigners filming them. The latter of course could not understand what the Adivasis were saying, which was a great source of mirth for the performers.
For me, it was interesting to see how Stan transforms these stories into representations of resistance. This is the first time I heard about the reversal of representation by Adivasis themselves. I am surprised he told this story in my presence because he must have been aware that I was the only non-Indian person there.

Fieldwork diary, 05/05/2010, Gudalur

I would say now, after a little less than one year spent working with South Indian NGOs (all of them informed by Christian ideologies), that it is almost impossible to get at the "truth" (whatever this is). There are so many gatekeepers and layers of meaning, and everyone discloses only part of their equally incomplete pictures to one. Stories keep changing. Truth has a different face every day. Facts are twisted and turned to suit particular purposes. Transparency and accountability are fiction. I now go with, "The longer you stay, the less you know" (Kolanad 1994: 14).

Limits

Recognising my own limits and boundaries became one of my chief fieldwork learning experiences. Thanks to various upheavals in my life during the PhD, the production of this thesis has been through many hesitant beginnings, unanticipated interruptions and break offs, and halting restarts. Its incarnations have been many. Not least because of difficult fieldwork circumstances, and recovering from illness, and the death of loved ones. Ultimately though, I believe that the research gained in maturity of analysis, and richness of material, thanks to my long-term involvement thus afforded with the people I worked with and researched.

Fieldwork diary, 11/11/2009, Gudalur

One of the things that seem pretty much self-evident, but do not really hit one until one has (re)entered the field, is the realisation that, after all, one is the principal research instrument that is as prone to wrong calibration (think cultural baggage, hidden prejudices, misconceptions, etc.), mistakes in measurement (think impossibility of objectivity, misunderstandings, misinterpretations), failure (think illness, practical obstacles concerning food, water, and sanitation), and requires as much maintenance (the part most often neglected) as any research instrument. This is especially the case if one is not from the culture one has set out to study, and if the latter is a marginalised sub-culture. ["Such is the agonistic ontology of the anthropologist fieldworker as human instrument for sensing difference." (Ben Campbell, personal communication, 12/06/2014)]

As I write this from a position of relative good health and circumstantial stability I do not wish to obscure how the hardships and ill health encountered along the way have both (often involuntarily) influenced the way I conducted this research, and informed the way I think about it. Neither do I wish to veil my ignorance in impenetrable language nor pretend that I have worked it all out. I would consider it absolutely preposterous to even think of comparing my situation with that of Adivasi peoples affected by the loss of their land and livelihoods. I am regularly overcome by the perversity of the seemingly unbridgeable gap between my and Adivasi lifeworlds. What, for instance, the experience of having to sell my home of 30 years during this research has personally taught me though, is possibly a tiny inkling of what it may mean for someone to have to give up their land.

It is through the limits encountered during the research process that I, as the researcher, came to accept them as an integral, and even necessary part of the research process. I hence conceive of limits not as "limiting", but ultimately knowledge-producing.

One of these limits concerned the difficult issue of reciprocity in the field. The Trobriand concept of *pokala* (Bernard 2011: 442) comes closest to what I hoped to achieve in Gudalur: "pokala is the giving of something by someone of inferior status to someone of superior status 'in the hope, but without the promise, that something will be returned' (Hutchins 1980: 25-26)". During fieldwork I found myself giving and giving (especially in terms of donations of Adivasi books to the AMS/ACCORD library), so as to counter the notion of research as a unilaterally extractive process. With time, however, I had to realise that it was becoming a one-way exchange, leading to a more realistic practice of reciprocity in the field on my part.

Another limit was that of personal ethnic origin – a factor I could not influence:

Fieldwork diary, 12/05/2010, Gudalur

I am beginning to realise that I can relate to Mari this well because she was an outsider as well. I mistakenly assumed that she had the same status as Stan in the community, but she does not. She came here as a foreigner, like myself. In a country where one's place of birth, one's "native place", and one's caste pre-determine one's life choices and outcomes to such an extent, it is incredibly hard for outsiders, such as myself and Mari, to gain respect with (local) people. This seems to be even more so the case for women because of their less visible roles in society.

In terms of limits, I would not like to withhold the fieldwork insights gained from having thyroid eye disease and how this prompted me to transform participant observation. From 2007 until two surgeries in 2010 and '11 respectively, I suffered from the visible symptoms (protruding eyes) of a peculiar disease called thyroid eye disease (Graves' ophthalmopathy) in connection with Graves' disease. While physical discomfort (thanks to Gudalur's high humidity) and aesthetics (Mari continuously assured me that big eyes were beautiful in India) were less of a concern than back home, I could not help being bothered by an observation that would throw me into a bit of a methodological quandary. I began to notice it as soon as I had anticipated that people would start ignoring me again, thanks to the novelty of my presence wearing off, and the relative familiarity with my person. The opposite, however, appeared to be the case. People seemed to be imitating my eyes, which drew my attention to the fact that it appeared to be my eyes that made people more aware of whenever I was watching them. While often only little attention is paid to the actual physical tools necessary for the all-important act of observation in ethnographic fieldwork, I thus had the opportunity of observing first-hand what happens when the act of observing people in itself is rendered more visible, thanks to certain physical attributes of the observer. More visible than I had wished for, in any case. Since the size of my eyes was something I lacked the power to change back then, I came up with a different strategy. Instead of a participant observer I became an observant participant. Rather than chiefly watch people, this compelled me much more to DO what people were doing than I would have otherwise. When I was in the Adivasi school, I would trace Tamil letters with the kids in the back row. I would sing and dance and drum with them every morning at assembly. During break times I would play *kabadi* with them and catching stones on the back of your hand. I would read when they read. When I was staying with a friend, I would go collect water from the river with her and her family and friends, and try to balance the heavy colourful curved plastic pots on my head. I became particularly good at sifting rice and making chappatis, jobs no one seemed to be very fond of. Albeit by

volunteering to make chappatis I was not being very feminist, Mari joked, thus somewhat falling out of favour with the more feminist-leaning female members of the organisation. Overall, I found it astonishing how much I learned thanks to being an observant participant, rather than predominantly a participant observer. Being an active participant more than a dispassionate observer then meant developing "empathy" and becoming "friends". In Gudalur, this turned out to be a very gendered exercise.

Friendship, empathy, and gendered fieldwork

Fieldwork diary, 25/05/2010, Gudalur

Practice, practice, practice. This is what fieldwork is. Always staying alert. One can never really switch off. However, training one's memory to soak up and retain facts like a sponge becomes easier as people start repeating themselves, and the amount of new facts decreases. Fieldwork is above all about fostering and nurturing relationships with all kinds of beings – human as well as non-human – and not simply about extracting data. I am realising the importance of the distinction between personal (rural, preferred in India) and impersonal (industrial, technology-based, seemingly preferred in Europe) relationships. The lesson learned is that no amount of technical gadgetry can replace good human relationships and language/communication skills.

During fieldwork I often wondered whether differently gendered approaches to doing ethnography (not necessarily only along the binary opposition of male and female) produced different results. I would now support the statement that anthropologists of different genders do anthropology differently. Okely (2009), for instance, calls for the traditional, often masculinist mask of competence to be dropped. I argue that some social scientists/anthropologists are more likely to use their emotions as instruments of analysis than others. Recent literature on anthropological fieldwork tries to rehumanise the method by reinserting emotions as a prime research tool, where they had previously been dismissed as irrational and excised to meet "intellectual rigour". Davies and Spencer (2010), for instance, explore the idea that emotion is not antithetical to thought or reason, but is instead an untapped source of insight that can complement more traditional methods of anthropological research.

The question of gaining more supposedly in-depth data thanks to a conscious decision to enter more intimate, and thus potentially also more mutually harmful relationships with research participants, is a tricky one. Can one simultaneously be a friend and an anthropologist researcher? For a pithily insightful discussion of this question in the Indian context I turned to, and found many analogies to my own fieldwork experience, in Nita

Kumar's (1992) "Friends, Brothers, and Informants". For any future research project I intend to adopt the friendship research approach developed, for instance, by Paloma Gay Y Blasco together with her research collaborator Liria De La Cruz Hernandez (Gay Y Blasco and De La Cruz Hernandez 2012).

Ultimately, I believe that my becoming friends and colleagues with NGO staff, in addition to being a researcher, afforded me access I would not have been granted as an outside researcher, especially not from a non-Indian national and cultural, academic, and anthropological (because of their vilification of most of anthropology) background such as my own. I found that familiarity was crucial for trust. If people did not know everything about me and my motives, they did not trust me. In this context, successful research hinges on becoming a trusted insider, as opposed to remaining a distrusted outsider. This, however, points to complex and difficult questions of research ethics.

Ethics

Is one allowed to study the people one would like to study? Who is in control of the research process and output, the researcher and/or the people? Who decides what is to be studied, the researcher and/or the people? What about free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), especially concerning IP? How can one make sure to obtain FPIC from everyone affected by the research (and not just the NGO leaders, for instance)? How can one manage/overcome ethnic boundaries, bigotry, outright xenophobia, suspicion, and resistance to research? If one encounters all of these, is it ethical and actually practicable to continue with the research, especially if it is only for one's personal gain, i.e. to receive a PhD? Is one allowed to conduct something as totally individual-oriented as PhD research in a community-oriented society (even though it may be changing to a more individualised society)? What about (Adivasis' claims to) indigenous self-representation? How does one prevent the representation of Adivasis by anyone other than Adivasis from becoming patronising?

These are just some of the questions I continually asked myself in the field, and will beyond the PhD. I have not yet found satisfactory answers to them, and most likely will only incompletely.

Throughout my research I felt continuously compelled to decide where my loyalties are, with academia or the organisation. At times, I perceived myself to be working in two diametrically opposed worlds, even though I continually sought to transcend this dichotomy and to find a way for these two worlds to work together. "To link the unlinkable", as Felix Padel put it at a seminar at Durham University. At first the dichotomy between academia and

AMS/ACCORD appeared to me thus: on the one hand, there was a stable UK academic environment, in this case Durham University, which functions according to rigorously thought-out rules and conventions. On the other, there was the highly unpredictable, negotiable, malleable, and messy world of Indian NGO activism, of which I was a firm and passionate part of as a participant observer and observant participant, during my fieldwork in India and the UK. This I chose to be in order to be genuine and trustworthy for the people I was researching, working, and living with. This way, I could gather better "data" than I would have been able to as a dispassionate observer.

To continue my understanding of what appeared to me at the time mutually exclusive and unbridgeable worlds – in the activists' understanding, academia limits its information (not even always by design) to a highly educated, and, in the activists' opinion, privileged and elite community of scholars. Community rights activism, however, advocates open access to information for all, to effect social change towards a more socially just and equitable society. Academia works on the implicit assumption that it has the right to study everything in this world. Research and researchers endeavour their hardest to be reasoned, scientific, objective, and accountable. Activists' work, on the other hand, can, by its very nature, sometimes be inherently biased, emotionally driven, and highly politicised, since it strives to effect a change in the status quo. It suffices to say, thankfully, that there are a million shades of grey between academia and activism. In reality, and on the ground, and especially in a heated argument, however, as oftentimes experienced during my fieldwork, one is easily placed exclusively in either one or the other camp.

This kind of oppositional, polarised thinking is highly problematic in whatever field. In order to be able to study why we think in these dichotomies, we first have to acknowledge that they exist. As regards my ethnographic encounter with the Adivasi activists, I first had to experience these dichotomies in order to be able to understand them. As a consequence, I also had to adapt the ethical framework elaborated pre-fieldwork here in the UK, within the safe confines of academia, to a localised ethics more reflective of fieldwork ground realities.

Dealing with morally and politically positioned actors entails particular ethical research challenges. In particular, upholding the claim to critical research as a politically left-leaning researcher encounters a particular moral, and consequently ethical quandary when trying to critique movements and ideologies that 1) lay claim to a particular moral authority, and 2) one identifies with as a scholar-activist. As Mookherjee (2008), in her work on middle-class left-liberal activists in Bangladesh and public memories of sexual violence of the war in 1971, affirms, "When leftist anthropologists examine progressive movements and the activists and

intellectuals engaged in such radical politics, they tend to share the same values as those of the intellectuals they study." Critique of critique inhabits an a priori charged position, however, if this involves taking a critical stance of morally cemented actors and ideas, and possibly engenders a personally ambiguous moral position, one enters a particularly tense arena. This is especially true for research relationships that go beyond mere researcher-researched hierarchies and enter the realm of friendship and kinship.

Independence and critical distance necessary for – however impossible this may seem – unbiased analysis are hard to achieve if this involves distancing oneself from views one (partly) sympathises with. At the same time as one fears that one's critique may undermine the very critique one (to some degree) supports, one is afraid that one's lack of critical distance sabotages one's critique of critical movements. Or, as Mookherjee (2008) suggests, that "criticism of these progressives may be understood to strengthen right wing politics and to harm leftist collectives." In this context, it is a particular challenge to raise the uncomfortable questions – the ones that may test alliances and loyalties, and thus could possibly endanger one's own hard-won position – and to actively engage with the many internal contradictions produced by movements characterised by and engaging with conflicts of interest.

Next to David Mosse's (2005) critique of Development practice dealt with extensively in this thesis, Fiona Ross' (2003) work on the gendered dimensions of providing testimony on extreme violence before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and Richard Wilson's (1997) work on human rights activism, for instance, have contributed important discussions on the ethical quandaries faced by researchers conducting critical research on actors and institutions inhabiting strong moral positions.

Mookherjee (2008) raises an especially important question in this context – how the complexity of ethnographic research results can be reconciled with the simplicity of messages activists often claim is necessary in order to reach as broad an audience as possible. As she suggests, "[t]he complexities revealed by ethnographic research might defy [a] simple activist message" because "a more complex narrative would harm the movement and 'kill' the message." Conducting research on activist causes entails occupying contradictory subject positions and negotiating the conflicting requirements of ethnographic scrutiny and activist work – an arena in which neutrality is not an option. In this context, anthropologists have to be ever cognisant of and articulate the specific contribution ethnographic insights can contribute to respective activist causes since taking sides is often the only option.

Two further aspects of research ethics relevant to this work are related to the ethics of Development work itself. Work in Development entails a constantly guilty conscience – that one is economically better off than the people one works with; that one is unintentionally and insidiously promoting, and to a degree imposing one's lifestyle and worldview, simply by one's presence; and that one is never doing enough (and it never is enough since everything is incomplete in Development, which is, by definition, a needs industry).

At the same time we need to question our model of development, i.e. what level of "development" we aspire to. Surely, the Western development model is not the way to go because it is ecologically unsustainable and unviable for the entire world. The irony of asking people in "developing" nations to scale down their lifestyles, and instilling them with a guilty conscience about their lifestyle choices, in light of the already existing discrepancies between their present lifestyles and those promoted by consumerist advertising and the media, was an ever-present point of discussion in Gudalur.

I round off this account of my fieldwork learning curve with a more informal collection of fieldwork lessons recorded in the field.

Fieldwork lessons

Fieldwork diary, various dates and locations

Fieldwork lessons & maxims learned in the field:

Always go look for yourself. Never take one opinion of another to be the case. Always ask the 5 Whys to determine the root cause of a defect or problem. It is postulated that five iterations of asking why is generally sufficient to get to a root cause. Do not stop at the symptoms; instead always try going on to lower level root causes. There is never only one definite explanation for a phenomenon, but a multitude of at times competing ones.
Nothing is as it seems in India. Be bold. Expect the unexpected. Always stay independent. Never religiously adhere to any thought system in particular. Do not let yourself be distracted by people who do not appreciate what you are working on.
This world is too complex to be grasped comprehensively. Having to decide how to do research day in and day out is very exhausting – pace your energy. Do not conform to social norms, or only as far as necessary. Guard liberty, freedom, and independence. Never forget where you come from, but do not foreground it. Some things one learns pretty quickly in India – let things come to one, rather than forcing anything to happen. Let people do things for one and do not insist on doing things oneself if people are really happy and insistent to help one (this seems to be particularly true for women). One might even cause offence if one does. Local people do things much better, quicker, and efficient than one will ever manage to oneself.
Grab opportunities when they arise. Waiting for a second chance missed the first time round is not a recipe for fieldwork success. In fact, sometimes it can be one for disaster if this just was the only bus going to one's desired destination that day and one happens to have an important appointment to get to.

One only learns from one's mistakes, such as not switching on microphones. Take care of one's equipment (including and above all oneself).
Learn to become assertive. Learn to say no. Learn to walk off when a situation or a conversation does not yield any insights or becomes tedious. Become better at chit-chat and small talk. Expose oneself to as much interaction with people as possible, in order to learn the language and the manners. Expect a lot of pitfalls on the way. Learn to appear as if not intently listening, while keeping one's antennae tuned all the time. The juiciest information materialises out of nowhere at the most unexpected moments.
The requirements for any future research projects on the scale of a PhD are: It should really be doable in three years' time. It should be geographically, linguistically, and climatically manageable, thematically circumscribed, not situated in Extremistan. Less contrast between researcher and researched works better. The first thing to ask people is what they consider valuable and worthwhile research. Always get in touch with researchers and universities in the area. Learn about the geography, flora, and fauna of the region. Think carefully about choosing a country with a colonial history and the implications thereof.

From practical, general fieldwork lessons I now turn to discussing my specific insights born out of working with and doing research in (and, inevitably, "on", even though I avoid this term) an NGO setting, and, in particular, NGOs in South Asia.

Working with and doing research on an NGO

Fieldwork diary, 12/06/2010, Gudalur

Revolutionaries do not have time to talk!

Fieldwork diary, 23/03/2010, Gudalur

Mari and Stan came down (from their home high above Gudalur) together to the school/ACCORD office today (a rather rare occurrence). We had an impromptu and very productive meeting on the future development of the Culture Centre over the next few months, and my role in it.
Knowing that I am a person who has some of the knowledge (and funds) to access some of the resources they would like to have for their cultural centre and the school, I am beginning to feel I need to be more careful that it does not become too one-way an exchange. Frankly speaking, they can be quite demanding. I also feel that they hardly have the time and resources to start another project at the moment and support me with it. They are chronically underfunded (although, compared to other NGOs, well-off, I would say) and always frantically busy with their umpteen different projects, and pleasing national and international donors.
While people like Stan and Mari, despite their own various ongoing health and family problems, are gung-ho and rearing to go on the culture project, people like Ram and Rama, who effectively run the school, and with whom I interact on a day-to-day basis, are (naturally) a bit more sceptical about the realisation of the centre (and especially my role in it because I am, after all, a foreigner). Although they do not tell me directly, my inkling is that they would much rather have a tribal working in my place. Sadly, this is something which is, even after more than 25 years, not yet the rule, but the exception.
I thus need to move very carefully to negotiate these competing interests, while at the same time proving worthy of my position as a researcher for the Culture Centre.

Fieldwork diary, 12/05/2010, Gudalur

One problem I have observed is that one has to ask the really educated, upper-class, and powerful to receive an honest "no" here. "Ordinary" people, and especially Adivasis, are less likely to deny one's requests. Ideally, one would like to do it the right way, ask everyone, involve everyone in the decision-making process, and hear everyone's opinions first, but precisely this is the problem in a country of entreched caste and ethnic hierarchies: "participation" works according to very different rules here.
Here, if one has the authority to say and do things, wherever one derives this authority from – caste, class, income, gender, etc. – one goes ahead and uses it. Anything else is seen as weakness. I do not wish to appear cynical, however, it often seems to me that many people chiefly do things for others because of their status, background, family, etc., and hardly because they have asked nicely.

Two crucial and related aspects of researching organisations with a circumscribed membership are the negotiation of gatekeeping practices, and the ambivalent process of positioning oneself and becoming accepted as an "insider".

Circumnavigating NGO gatekeeping practices and becoming an insider

The key characteristic of NGOs in the region is that they are very well connected among those who share an ideological affinity. They are, however, difficult to approach from outside as an individual, or if one happens to be affiliated with one of the organisations on the respective "blacklists" of each of the organisations. Perwez (2008: 73) highlights the fact that there is a "government-NGO nexus in Tamil Nadu whereby the government has left it to NGOs to work independently or in tandem with district-level organisations to bring about social and economic change" and that "[s]uch an arrangement between government and NGOs […] has led NGOs to intervene and create their own sovereign boundaries with regard to those who are intervened and/or governed by these NGOs" (Perwez 2008: 77).

In this context, an anthropologist often (inadvertently) becomes a conduit for information for people who do not normally speak to each other. As a result, the danger of being instrumentalised as a spy, and thus jeopardising the integrity of one's research, is a very real one. Grills (2008: 22) relates a similar experience in his article "Researching Faith Based Organisations in India", in Devi Sridhar's "Anthropologists Inside Organisations: South Asian Case Studies". One of his informants stated that "'If you know one of us […] then you know us all.' Correspondingly, I found that upon penetrating the inner circle I had access to many of the key FBO [faith based organisations] leaders". Perwez (2008: 73) highlights the fact that "[a]ccessing the rural communities in India has always been a difficult task for an alien person, which has been made even more difficult with the growing numbers and practices of NGOs". He goes on to describe the "varied actions, strategies, routine practices

and processes through which NGOs create and maintain their sovereign-territorial boundaries" and NGOs' "quest for 'moral capital' – the need to boost moral standing with actors such as local communities, donors, the media, or state agencies" (Perwez 2008: 72). It is through the "NGO construction of the sites and communities […] as 'local', which has been viewed as attempts to secure the NGO presence as legitimate as well as to realise the twin objectives of empowerment and participation" (Perwez 2008: 72-3) that "anthropologists' long stay in the field has come to be seen by some NGOs as a threat to their patronising relationship with the community" and that "an anthropologist is considered someone akin to a spy". My experience of being approached by a reporter at the 2009 Indigenous Peoples Rally in Coimbatore in my capacity as a "foreign professor" (in spite of my protests at this appellation) echo this observation. "All this means that an understanding of techniques of gatekeeping by organisations becomes central to the pursuit of any anthropological inquiry attempting to work with or through organisations" (Perwez 2008: 73).

According to Sridhar (2008: 101) anthropologists have "generally used two approaches to study international institutions: critical discourse analysis, which focuses on language as a form of social practice, or being a participant insider." The sensitivity of the NGO environment in India means that researching them has to be done "with an awareness of their vulnerability and their reluctance to be examined from the outside." As Grills (2008: 33) asserts, "[t]he most effective method to overcome their reluctance to be studied from the 'outside' is to instead study [them] from the 'inside'". Mosse (2006: 936), however, warns of the dilemma of becoming an insider:

> As researchers, we resolved the intractable problems of access to closed organizational worlds through member- ship of the communities we ended up studying. But in doing we so substituted a set of boundaries that kept us *out* (the problem of access) with another set that kept us *in*.

The danger of doing research on and in an NGO is that one easily becomes ideologically co-opted into their goals. Anything seen as not contributing to their cause, or especially if it dissents from it, is either passively undermined or actively opposed. I was seen as a representative of an elitist, dominant Western culture merely by virtue of my skin colour. I was made aware of the activists' disapproval of the automatic position of power my Western cultural background placed me in, e.g. by having the money to come to India to conduct research "on", in relative and purely materialist terms, "poorer" Adivasis. Their attempts to compensate for, and level out these power hierarchies, resulted in adopting a slightly paternalistic attitude towards their Western "protégés", such as the Western volunteers from all walks of life they invite to visit, work and live with them.

What is really concealed behind gatekeeping practices? What do NGOs really want to keep secret? Is their "survival" (the avoidance of potentially negative publicity vis-à-vis donors; the cover-up and rewriting of mistakes, mishaps, and disasters) dependent on it? Who is to blame for this kind of "blame culture": the NGOs, the donors, the currently dominant "development culture", the ideology of progress preventing people from honestly owning up to what does not work, the pressure to succeed, the impossibility to admit failure? NGO funding is a dog-eat-dog world. NGOs are constantly engaged in damage minimisation activities. In this context, I argue that incomplete disclosure is necessitated by unequal power relations. Transparency is thwarted by the very system that demands it, I suggest.

Whatever the context, becoming an insider is problematic. It entails a host of different challenges for researching the elite.

Researching the Development elite

On researching the elite, Grills (2008: 31) confirms the "relative value of interviewing leaders compared with followers". The reality, however, is that researchers (myself included) and scientists, as well as NGO elites, do not like to be at the receiving end of the research interaction, being accustomed to being in charge of research. Especially as a researcher researching "elites", one thus has to quickly overcome the discomfort of being at the receiving end of the power imbalance in an NGO.

On the issue of access and consent to studying the "elite" possibly precluding access to other, less privileged social groups, Sridhar (2008: 103) perspicaciously reflects that,

> [t]he apparently irresolvable tension is that gaining informed consent from the powerful may preclude gaining it from the relatively powerless. Perhaps it is impossible to gain informed consent from everyone. Anthropology traditionally advocates on behalf of the poor and politically oppressed groups, possibly as a reaction to the guilt stemming from its historical association with colonialism. Gaining the consent of such communities before publication was intended to ensure that anthropology did not further harm them, and thus add to their oppression under neo-colonialism. However, this argument is complicated by the recent focus on studying up and researching inside organisations.

Indeed, choosing to study AMS/ACCORD barred me from gaining access to certain other people and organisations in the Nilgiris. AMS/ACCORD act as the gatekeeper to the Gudalur region, de facto monopolising the representation not only of their activities but also of the Adivasis of the region, esp. in the transnational sphere. This tight leash on representation, and the inherent representational power hierarchies, mean that "alternative" representations are hard to come by. I was able to meet most of the tribal/Adivasi peoples living in remote areas only through direct personal visits, as AMS/ACCORD try to strictly control the movements of the foreigners it hosts (like me). I, at the same time, could not risk upsetting them by

following my own research agenda, for reasons of trying to build trust with them. At the same time, I had to guard my own independence as a researcher.

Maintaining researcher independence

Working in collaboration with and through an NGO bears challenges and advantages. The conceptual and methodological independence of a researcher may be in jeopardy, especially in an organisation as militantly pro-tribal as AMS/ACCORD, which, on the other hand, makes investigating the process by which they reproduce a particular kind of stereotypical indigeneity all the more interesting. AMS/ACCORD, and most prominently its founder, Stan Thekaekara, do not, however, take lightly to criticism of their indigeneity rhetoric. Having lived with or in the vicinity of tribal peoples, and worked with them for the majority of his life, he brushes away any criticism of romanticising Adivasis. Yet, it is precisely the zeal to revitalise "traditional" tribal ways of life eroded as a result of their efforts at developing Adivasis, and to reconnect the younger generation with this ideal, that underpins the creation of ventures such as the CC/First Peoples Place. Stan could also be quite overbearing in his missionary zeal to promote a more community-oriented lifestyle. In such instances it was only by suspending active judgement of the activists' behaviour that I was able to record it (which I would term the Discovery Channel effect), and thus maintain methodological independence as a researcher.

Personally, this meant that I had to negotiate the dilemma arising out of being, on a personal level, sympathetic to tribal causes, yet at the same time, on a professional level, aware of the extant essentialising, stereotyping, and thus exclusionary, and even extremist tendencies arising out of this discourse. Even greater than the personal dilemma was the ethical dilemma. AMS/ACCORD did not usually invite people like myself to investigate their indigeneity factory, with their strong tribal empowerment through community-led research ethos, and critical stance towards the kind of colonial ethnography (the legacy of which anthropology itself has been grappling with for decades) that has characterised much of tribal studies in India. Mosse's (2005: 12, my emphasis) observation encapsulates my "dilemma" in Gudalur:

> Nonetheless, the impression that development agencies (donors, field agencies or others) always feel they have something to hide, or that confidentiality and proprietary claims over knowledge inevitably characterise the relationship between agencies and their contracted consultants or researchers (Panayiotopoulis 2002) is wrong. *Development organisations are in the habit of dealing with criticism and the questioning of their claims and actions (e.g. through reviews and evaluations). However, they are less tolerant of research that falls outside design frameworks, that does not appear to be of practical relevance, is wasteful of time or adds complexity and makes the task of management harder* (see discussion in Mosse 1998a). It is this that makes it

virtually impossible to sustain long-term participant observation in the absence of making a practical contribution.

For AMS/ACCORD as activists, Development professionals, and tribal advocates, projecting and inspiring a common and united tribal Adivasi identity was a daily necessity and survival strategy, and was thus the dominant discourse within the organisation. After all, foreign aid was and still is heavily dependent on the narratives tied to its project beneficiaries. And it is indeed a powerful narrative to turn exploited, landless, and culturally and economically fragile tribal groups into economically self-reliant, and culturally self-confident and proud indigenous communities, who are asserting their usufruct rights over the land they reclaimed by planting it with tea (which is no doubt "poetic justice", and a political statement in the face of the established plantation hierarchy in the Nilgiris). Because of the very dominance of this discourse, however, it silenced all other, possibly oppositional voices, such as my own objections from a researcher's perspective. In order to preserve the integrity of my critical examination of this discourse I thus had to be careful in its dissemination.

Another area in which I came to question the "independence" of the research concerned the issue of "influencing the field" (the camera effect). While my persona as an "expert" on IP working on the CC was complementary to my own research interest in the influence of indigeneity discourses on their land rights activism, and afforded me access to areas and documents that were otherwise strictly guarded, the lingering doubt remained, whether, by forging links with international advocacy groups and other indigenous organisations and sourcing materials on IP, I was in fact being too participant, and even reproducing a particular version of indigeneity myself, the production of which I had actually set out to study.

Another practical problem of working in/with/doing fieldwork in an organisation was that one could very easily get roped into doing too many things for them simultaneously, and become sidetracked from one's own research.

Whatever the lens, whether it is the anthropologist's desire to study tribes untainted by Development interventions, or the radical activist's dream for tribal communities to self-mobilise, uncorrupted by NGO ideology (which is non-existent in a state without Scheduled Areas and thus state-controlled development such as Tamil Nadu; Thanuja Mummidi, 06/09/2009, personal communication), objectivity remained an illusive goal in the field and researcher independence was more of an aspiration than a reality. Overall, regardless of the need for research on Development NGOs, my fieldwork experiences confirmed, rather than assuaged my doubts regarding the compatibility of researcher presence in NGOs and NGOs' capacity to accommodate researchers.

Researcher-NGO (in)compatibility?

In my experience, matching one's own and an NGO's expectations of each other was a thing of near-impossibility. On the one hand, many NGOs are reluctant to be forthcoming with information, and are naturally distrustful of researchers. On the other hand, and understandably, an NGO tries to attract the financially and socially most beneficial people for the organisation. Once it has enlisted their support, whether they are visiting donors and Development organisation representatives, or resident volunteers and temporary staff, an NGO directs its limited resources and capacities towards extracting the most and best possible out of these supporters.

Unless well-connected, a PhD-level researcher with limited financial resources is seldom a good match for an NGO's expectations of a foreign visitor. An initial phase of interest (what does s/he want from us? how can we assist her/him?), curiosity (what does s/he really want? what do we disclose/conceal and how do we keep this decision process confidential, so as not to sour possible future relations?), and experimentation ("how can we best put her/him to work in the NGO in a way that benefits the most people in the best possible way?") is often followed by a phase of decreasing interest, as everyday administrative NGO life (disproportionately often to do with meeting funding report deadlines) and other priorities once again take over.

Conversely, for the researcher trying to establish good working relations, and for the anthropologist trying to become an intrinsic part of an NGO, an initial phase of frantic data collection, social calls, and promises of future collaboration facilitated by one's interest-arousing newcomer status, are often followed by a period of relative disillusionment and ensuing reorientation. Calls are more infrequently returned, feedback and recognition of one's work become less frequent, and NGO staff one has been allocated to work with may simply be too busy, or have other priorities. The fact that one may be "allocated" particular NGO staff to work with, poses a problem in itself, as many NGOs are hierarchically structured (the main distinctions being between tribal and non-tribal, class, caste, and level of education), in spite of their egalitarian ideals. For instance, those Adivasis I was allocated to work with were mainly those who had previously been "exposed" to foreign visitors, i.e. knew "how to deal" and communicate with "foreigners".

In addition, foreign volunteers and indigenous NGO staff may experience difficulties working with each other because of cultural, class, and language barriers.

As a result of these experiences I developed several strategies, over time, to deal with the situations described above.

Adaptation

Initially, I invested everything I possibly could, financially and personally, in establishing good relations with the greatest range of NGO staff possible (and not just those whose task it was to deal with foreign visitors). I funded and ordered books on IP and Adivasis for the Culture Centre library, and prepared teaching materials for the unit on Adivasi and IP in the teacher training curriculum. I took part in as many cultural activities as possible, recorded and videoed them, and organised screenings at the school for people not able to take part in them. I worked with Mari for half of the week, and also assisted her on non-culture-centre-related projects (since she is also a women's rights and Dalit advocate, in addition to being a tribal activist, and sits on several boards of directors of non-governmental advocacy organisations, as well as contributes to governmental planning commissions).

Such an intensive level of involvement naturally created an implicit expectation of continued high-level involvement, which my thyroid disease-related decreasing energy levels at the time, however, did not permit. I thus learned to pace myself and gradually spaced out my points of contact and involvement. I learned to gear and design my research output for them towards specific and immediate real-life applications within the NGO, so as to ensure maximum mutual feedback (which meant tangible benefits for them in the form of information, and data for me in the way they dealt with this information). Perwez (2008: 81) mirrors my approach towards AMS/ACCORD I came to adopt over time: "I decided to reciprocate without making any compromises with regard to my own fieldwork".

I also learned to piggyback onto other foreigners' visits, becoming a point of contact for new long-term volunteers such as myself, and short-term visitors. The former usually received an induction into the NGO, during which there was increased official and social contact with NGO staff, whereas the latter would be shown around the NGO according to an intensive schedule for the duration of their visit, depending on their relative importance for the NGO (funding representatives received by far the most cordial, but possibly not the most sincere reception). The differences I observed in the reception of visitors subsequently became an important source of insight for me.

Positionality

Another issue I grappled with was positionality. Othering and ethnocentrism were not uncommon. Many people were fond of the distinction between "us" and "foreigners". I found it impossible not to position myself. In fact, I was automatically and immediately, and quite involuntarily positioned. Attempting not to take sides was the surest way of being positioned.

I found that doing research in a zone considerably charged with competing interests engendered the problem that, unless I had been accepted by both sides as the impartial expert mediator, I needed to position myself quite exclusively so as to be able to solicit information from at least one side. Obtaining reliable information from both sides was impossible because of the instantaneousness of information exchange and flow. Either party was instantly able to determine which "side" I was on, no matter how "objective" I would like to have remained. NGOs are such a powerful presence in Tamil Nadu that it was extremely difficult to remain non-partisan or even neutral. One either aligned oneself with them or risked turning them into an antagonistic force. This usually ended up being detrimental for the progress of one's research. Initiating independent research activities was construed as a breach of trust. I personally found that the easiest and most conflict-free way I could conduct research not only with, but also on AMS/ACCORD was to align myself with them, while trying not to be co-opted too much by them. In this regard, I quickly noticed the difference between "native" (Indian in this case) and "non-native" researchers (such as myself). The former adapted more cunning access negotiation strategies than the latter, right from the start. This, I found, resulted in more "successful" research survival/progress of the former in the competitive research environment that the Nilgiris presented. This, however, is not to disregard or discount the equally numerous disadvantages both positions – that of independent and that of "insider" research – harbour.

The issue of positionality was indicative of a larger dilemma I faced – the reconciliation of my researcher persona with my activist leanings, and the concomitant danger of going too native within an activist setting.

Becoming an activist and the dangers of going too native

Fieldwork diary, 26/04/2010, Gudalur

What I am currently grappling with the most in the field are the following issues:
1) Becoming totally enmeshed in the activist discourse in the field and starting to think/write/argue/be like an activist.
2) Not always and sometimes completely failing at conceptually stepping back and abstracting from the activist stance, and seeing/analysing it from an anthropological perspective, i.e. going too native and often realising this too late.
3) Taking a long time to digest and develop a different perspective on the activists because of the guilt issue/personal identification with the issues, and the concomitant, but in fact misguided notion that one's critical analysis would somehow be "damaging to the cause".
4) Feeling like a spy/fraud/impostor/traitor because of having to put oneself into a non-activist position in order to be able to analyse them; the frequent impossibility of communicating this to the activists because positioning oneself outside of their often quite exclusive discourses (which they adopt as a protective mechanism) disqualifies one from membership therein.

The way I try to reconcile these points with my own conscience are:
1) Time solves a lot. For me it does not necessarily dampen, but has nuanced the formerly romanticised radicalism.
2) Now I feel I sometimes become too academic (whatever this means in different contexts), and fail to represent the activist issues accurately and authentically. At the same time, however, I never stop feeling uneasy about conceptualising activism and academia as a dichotomy, to whatever degree of mutual exclusiveness, because it is my opinion that they never are and should not be either/or.
3) In actual fact, one can never really know/gauge beforehand what impact our contributions will have. Often they are at best dismissed and at worst ignored. In my analysis, without wanting to affect intellectual hubris, I am trying to arrive at insights that I think and hope will be useful for both anthropology and the activists. Hence my focus is on how narrative connects the Development activists (in my case) across different divides (national, tribal/non-tribal, class, religion, gender, etc.), and how the quality and presence/lack or flow/interruption of stories determines the outcome of the "Development" interactions.
4) My practical solution, for want of a better one, has been to stay actively involved and "do stuff" as my activist self (like selling the tea that they produce), while trying to develop my anthropological analysis thereof as my academic self. One of the tests, whether the two are in fact reconcilable, will be when I will, hopefully, translate the most important insights into Tamil, and put them to the Adivasis themselves.

David Mosse, in his seminal "Cultivating development" (2005), gives expression to many insights previously preferred to be left unsaid by other researchers, out of a habitual (and often misplaced) sense of conceptual allegiance to the people they work with. Judging from the ripples his analysis has created, we can say that researchers often have to reconcile themselves with the label of 'pariah'.

Admittedly, my own interest in Adivasis initially stemmed from the image painted of them as the original rebels/outcasts/resisters of the state, a representational practice described, for instance, by Demmer (2008). Equally, it was views of activists such as Mari (Marcel Thekaekara 1994b) such as the following that attracted me to Adivasi activism: "This is probably because their outlook on life is a rejection of what the rest of the world perceives as progress. Historically 'progress and civilization' have always been equated with material wealth and its accumulation". Because of this empathy with Adivasis' ways of life supposedly different from the "mainstream", which I shared with the activists, I constantly had to guard against going too native by favouring activist rhetoric over anthropological scrutiny in my thinking. At the same time I perceived a pressing need to "translate" anthropology for activist audiences.

Translating Anthropology

Fieldwork diary, 29/08/09, Thalavadi

Some fundamental issues I am still grappling with are how to bridge the divisions between academia and the "real" world "out there". One could of course argue that these divisions serve certain purposes, or are artificial altogether, citing examples of people who are both practitioners and academicians, but from my vantage point they are undeniable. My concern is how to translate the knowledge acquired and generated in academia, i.e. the basic knowledge not of what to think, but how to think, into knowledge that can be applied to real-world situations, without again dogmatising it. Ideally, I want to develop this "how to" together with as many people as possible, and in turn spread it to as many people as possible, without going about like proselytising missionaries imposing it on everyone. The basic premise to start out from is that knowledge that is of benefit to people is worth spreading, or even more basic, worth pointing out to people. Whether they take it or leave it, is up to them.

A question that has bothered me since undergraduate days is how to apply anthropological knowledge to the real-world contexts from whence it originally emerged, i.e. how to overcome the massive inequalities that still characterise relationships between elite academic institutions, comparatively affluent researchers, and the people they study. The key is to forge dialogues and create partnerships across this seemingly insurmountable divide while, at the same time, constantly remain heedful of inherited oppressive power hierarchies, so as not to inadvertently create new ones – in short to make anthropological learning more accessible and democratic. A particular concern of mine has therefore been the translation of ethnographic materials on Adivasis into native languages. This is a concern that goes hand in hand with AMS/ACCORD's efforts to document the Bettakurumba, Mullukurumba, Kattunayakan, Paniya, and Irular languages, to create primers in these languages for the tribal school, Vidyodaya, and the learning centres in the villages (so far only Paniya has been realised), and eventually translate ethnographic materials on Adivasis into primarily Tamil and Malayalam, or plain English. Here the specific challenges lie both on the linguistic (as in translating anthropological literature heavy in discipline-specific jargon into plain English) as well as on the conceptual level (as in translating anthropological theory into accessible practical applications).

Often, translation only works one-way though. Tilche (2011: 31) observes that "[t]ranslation" is thus by definition a "misunderstanding", an outcome of social negotiation ([Latour] 1988: 65). A "scientific fact", Latour suggests, can only make a claim to truth within a network – "they are like trains, they do not work off their rails" (1988: 226). Apart from the issues of access to knowledge about Adivasis discussed above, and the role the appeal of the exotic plays, this may, for example, explain why non-Adivasis may be more drawn to reading materials about tribals than Adivasis themselves, since a) this is information

Adivasis already know, and b) these materials are mostly written in a language unknown to tribals.

This concern with "translating" anthropology is part of two larger debates that are related: 1) the relationship of Indigenous Studies (in this case Adivasi Studies) to Western anthropology, and 2) the relationship of activism to academia.

A critique of (Western) anthropology by Adivasis and Adivasi representatives – observations on the academia vs. activism debate

> *"How will fifty-nine million six hundred and twenty-eight thousand, six hundred and thirty-nine people capture and put together their history and their culture from the storm winds of areas ruled by twenty-five states and the central government? […] If Nagesia has to learn from the writings of some anthropologist, he has to get that much education in order to read that material."*
>
> Pterodactyl (Devi and Spivak 1993: 186)

Fieldwork diary, 08/12/2009, Gudalur

I am only just realising how critical I have become of anthropology. According to the activists, it is an inherently extractive process. To really make it reciprocal, one has to become part of the community; one has to dedicate one's life to the people one has chosen to study.
The problem is that academic anthropology is a very exclusive discourse, often very far removed from the realities of the people studied; not in terms of research findings (these may be valid within the cultural context that anthropology comes from), but in terms of language (why do we feel we need to put ideas into words our informants do not even understand?). For these reasons, inter alia, anthropology has an incredibly bad reputation among Development activists (or whatever one prefers to call them, professionals, social entrepreneurs, etc.) here in Gudalur.
Of course there are different kinds of anthropologies, depending on where one conducts one's fieldwork, but the more marked the difference between the people and the researcher is, in terms of educational, social, and financial background, the wider a gap it is to bridge. As a researcher, one becomes frustrated and burnt-out because one realises one's mental and physical health do not live up to the expectations one has set oneself pre-fieldwork. One feels like a failure. In fact, one constantly feels like asking "how the heck have others done this before me?" and "is it all just a big fraud"?

Fieldwork diary, 28/04/2010, Gudalur

Mari today told me the story of the anthropology students from Calicut University who descended on Kappala, a Mullukurumba village, with their impertinent questions, immortalised in People and Other Pests (Marcel Thekaekara 1991d). AMS/ACCORD have really had their share of obnoxious researchers, free riders, and opportunists over the years. I shall not be able to make good all the damage done and salvage anthropology's reputation. They do have a different, more nuanced picture of anthropology too though – e.g. Mari thinks very highly of Nurit Bird-David who explained to them that Kattunayakan live(d) a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. This explained some of the difficulties in their dealings with them they had in the beginning.

Representational power balances are shifting. IP are demanding the repatriation of DNA and other samples taken from their ancestors, often without their consent or even knowledge. Much like the former colonies are demanding the restitution of their pillaged cultural heritage, often as a result of a resurgent or nascent nationalism, IP are demanding back theirs. With the difference, however, that IP still suffer from internal colonialism, economic and cultural imperialism, and social marginalisation, at the hands of the state structures engulfing them. For them it is not only about being able to properly bury the remains of their ancestors, accompanied by the requisite rituals, or to freely speak their languages without discrimination or prosecution, or to rewrite the histories they were omitted from and misrepresented in. For IP it is about reappropriating their most valuable economic, cultural, and social good, and their means of future survival – often conceptualised as a next-of-kin and/or guardian – their land.

IP are becoming more and more vocal and internationally present (Denzin, Lincoln et al. 2008, Hendry 2005, Smith 1999, Faschingeder 2001, Blaser, Feit et al. 2004, Blaser 2010, Devy 2006, Smith 1999). Articulate and versed in many different ways of life, they are increasingly claiming the sole right to self-representation. Hendry (2005: 3) writes that "[i]t could be the anthropologists, curators, and ethnographic filmmakers who are threatened now, but only if we keep excluding the people we work with from our larger discourses".

How does Western social and cultural anthropology, as we know it, adapt in the face of increasing indigenous critique thereof and rightful claims to self-representation? Will the former scientific annex to the colonial endeavour be able to creatively, constructively and effectively enter into dialogue and partnership with IP, whether they be teachers or agricultural workers, pastoralists or scholars, diplomats or fisherwomen and -men, tea-growers or investment bankers, musicians or hunter-gatherers? And if yes, how?

As I discovered in Gudalur, to my own chagrin, the aura of exclusiveness, as in excluding a large potential readership and potential group of critics, has not yet left anthropology. According to the activists, the academic discourse is ultimately an elitist one, precluding "common" people (a very problematic concept in its own right) from participation, through complex layers of hierarchical access, language, and entitlements. Western anthropology, as part of this academic discourse, the activists contended, is still an exercise reserved for members of the materially wealthy elites, such as myself. Who is able to "do" anthropology (still mostly "on" rather than "with" others), depends on who has access to the means to do it. Subaltern indigenous and/or tribal peoples mostly do not have the means, the activists argued. And if Adivasis do, they are in turn often accused of becoming part of the elite and becoming

removed from the real concerns of their people that revolve around survival. Anthropology thus is and remains an exercise of power, I was told. Academic critique was perceived as sterile, and undermining and counterproductive to activist action. I learned, for instance, of the importance of elders and the concomitant difficulty of gaining respect as a young member of a profession that should have long been handed over to the people studied. In Gudalur, I also learned, however, that there is a "do-gooder" hierarchy in Development – people such as teachers, whose job it is to share their knowledge and thus open up opportunities for other people, are valued more than people such as researchers, who are perceived to be extracting knowledge solely for their own benefit. The activists' argument was that, unless research results are rendered in simple language at the conclusion of the research process, for everyone to access and benefit from, the knowledge gained remains accessible only to an exclusive circle of academics.

I do not wish merely to reproduce the activist critique of anthropology, however. Activism exhibits plenty of shortcomings of its own. Indeed, I argue that, rather self-defeatingly, the activists' anti-Western, occidentalising critique of the scientific canon on Adivasis often ended up echoing ethnocentric ultra-nationalist Indian criticism of Western science and enlightenment ideals by condemning, in one occidentalist sweep, almost the whole of anthropology, with the laudable exception of only a few individual anthropologists they knew personally. On the whole, the AMS/ACCORD activists failed to engage in-depth with the breadth and complexity of anthropology, and Adivasi Studies (independent of tribal studies) in particular. They largely ignored the comparative tools and concepts for appreciating the forms of knowledge and relational practice pursued in defiance of hegemonic orders that anthropology has developed. Also, the activists framed their critique of academia, and certain streams of anthropology in particular, as an indigenous critique of non-indigenous representation of the indigenous, i.e. as an Adivasi critique of non-Adivasi representation of Adivasis. This corresponds with their narrative strategies, evidenced throughout this thesis, of attributing authorship to Adivasis and negating their own, and of completely writing out their (the activists') own agency and mentioning only that of the Adivasis. This includes, for instance, writing funding proposals and newsletters from the perspective of the Adivasis (when they were in actual fact written by Stan, Mari, Manoharan, Ramdas, and other activists). I assume that most recipients (funding agencies, friends and well-wishers, etc.) were to some degree aware of this conceptual ploy, and went along with it as Development convention. Nevertheless, in my opinion, after having witnessed for some time in Gudalur the representational discrepancies between the glossy official AMS/ACCORD literature, and the

reality it purported to represent diverging quite significantly from it, such narrative tricks seemed to me with time less credible and endearingly creative, and acquired an aftertaste of being contrived and even deceiving.

Given these misgivings with both academia and activism, and the tensions between them, it would seem that simultaneous work in academia and Development is incompatible, considering that the two fields work according to totally different boundaries and rules. I would suggest, however, rather than continuing to ignore the inescapable elephant in the room, that we can do the obvious – acknowledge its existence and try and shift the power balances. During my time in Gudalur, I enlarged the existing and sowed the seeds for a new anthropological library in the cultural centre, by collecting as many different sources about IP worldwide, and Adivasis in particular, as was possible, with limited funds and time. In particular, I sought to encourage especially the younger generation of Adivasis to critically engage with the literature so far produced *on* them, but not *by* them. I nourish the hope that, by doing so, I was able to set in motion a process to reconfigure the power relationships between researchers and researched, at least in one location. Thankfully, there are many other hopeful examples. Ultimately, however, I argue throughout this thesis, that indigenous peoples are best suited to represent themselves.

What really needs to start happening more then, in order to shift representational power imbalances, is truly representative community-led research – determined neither by NGOs, nor outside researchers, nor the more dominant elements of a community.

Community-led research

> *"As managers of large resources and large organisations, NGOs all over the world have been caught up in evolving complex 'scientific' methods to be accountable to their donors. How much have these methods contributed to being accountable to the community?"*
> Stan Thekaekara (2000: 571)

I have already broached the strong pro-community-led research stance AMS/ACCORD advocate. Three fieldwork diary entries express this overriding concern best:

Fieldwork diary, 11/11/2009, Gudalur

If there are only two things I have learnt so far from working with AMS/ACCORD, and the inspiring people here, first about development in general and secondly about attaining self-reliance as an utterly marginalised community, it is that the communities themselves have to be the ones conducting research on themselves, possibly with input from outside in the beginning, but always with the primary goal of training enthusiastic people from the communities themselves as the actual investigators. The least thing they need is someone like me zooming in from a middle-class, Western background.

Fieldwork diary, 01/05/2010, Gudalur

Reading Joy Hendry's (2005) "Reclaiming Culture: Indigenous People and Self-Representation" and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) "Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples" has profoundly changed my outlook on my own research. I am beginning to realise the futility of my endeavour to connect Adivasis with some of the things that have been written about them – they can do such a better job themselves!
Anthropological research on disadvantaged/marginalised people or people of lesser socio-economic status is essentially an exercise of power. Rather than sending a researcher of a completely different ethnicity and language into a socio-economically disadvantaged community, members of that community itself should be supported to become researchers of their own people.

Fieldwork diary, 16/05/2010, Gudalur

I am beginning to realise more and more that IP doing studies of their own culture is the way to go, not people doing studies "on" them. IP are sufficiently knowledgeable and trained to conduct these studies of their communities themselves.
If I could conduct this research again, I would prefer to train (an) indigenous person(s) to become an anthropologist, rather than conduct a study of my own, on my own.
I will suggest to Priya to do a study of her own culture in her own language – about the Bettakurumba in Bettakurumba – "written entirely in the non-literary, indigenous language of the native ethnographer" (Bernard 2006: 471). My own research would then be about "An Experiment in Native Ethnography". Is something like this conceivable in the power-laden context of Adivasi-NGO relations?
I also suggested activities such as the school children audio-/videorecording the life histories of elders for others to listen to and for the curriculum, to reconnect the generations, and kids developing their own methodologies. Interestingly, a week later Stan himself suggested it.

*

After writing about "doing" in Part I, I continue briefly by writing about writing in Part II.

Part II

Reflections on writing – across boundaries

> *"Walter Benjamin once dreamed of hiding behind a phalanx of quotations which, like highwaymen, would ambush the passing reader and rob him of his convictions."*
> A.K. Ramanujan (1989)

As Frank (2012) observes, "[t]he process of writing is the discovery; the writing itself is the finding". Writing up a PhD thesis is the painful process of unilaterally imposing an artificial order on a messy reality of a group of people one has been witness to for a short while. What helped me in the writing up process were two conceptual ploys – one, to conceive of writing

as art, and two, the thought experiment whether a writing according to permaculture principles (Holmgren 2002) would be possible.

What comes to constitute ethnographic knowledge worth presenting in a thesis is shaped by its reception within academia – i.e. what is anthropologically valid/worthy knowledge, and what is not. Rather like Latour's metaphysics, I have tried to map all the different drives that motivate the activists in this story, instead of focusing or reducing my analysis to a single explanation.

I also conceived of ethnography as a form of time travel. For me it was the constant shuttling between different levels: analysing one's own (past) life; analysing the research, i.e. other people's (past) lives; the actual anthropological writing; the meta-level of the writing about the writing (exemplified, for instance, by the Writing Across Boundaries project at Durham University); while keeping track of the present, i.e. keeping a record of the here and now to enable future time travel.

*

Lastly, I turn to some of the epistemological foundations of this research in Part III.

Part III
Epistemological considerations

Systems and holistic thinking

I decided to adopt a systems thinking and complexity theory approach because I hoped it would help me understand AMS/ACCORD's holistic and organic approach to Development, and why and how they are trying to tackle social problems at their roots. Also, as social actualities become ever more complex, I am aware that we as (social) anthropologists need to come up with theories to match and explain this complexity. To a certain extent, many of the global problems we face today stem from a fragmented approach to understanding, thinking, and educating. Anthropologists are good at being "generalists" and holism is a concept anthropologists are intimately familiar with. It is this increasing awareness of the degree of interconnectedness in and with our environments that guides my analysis of AMS/ACCORD's work.

The philosophy-action loop

"11. The philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."

Karl Marx (1845), Theses on Feuerbach

Most people in the field of international aid and social activism are both practitioners and theoreticians because they not only try to implement existing ideas, but are constantly at the helm of developing new ideas, and then turning them into action again. I have tried to build a similar philosophy-action loop into my research by, for instance, both working for and doing research on a Development organisation. Consequently, in my analysis of their work, I try to tease out the dialectical tension between theory and practice I observed in the field, where theory was vigorously dissected AND subsequently put into practice AND then turned back into theory again, in a continuous loop. In a mirror effort in this thesis I therefore

- talk about people who do this;
- try to represent this process visually and structurally in the way I interlink the chapters and make them form an interconnected circle rather than a linear and logical progression, for instance by coming full circle at the end/beginning of the thesis (which is hard to represent visually in a linear medium such as a PhD thesis).

Questioning ethnographic authority and collaborative authorship

Fieldwork diary, 10/04/2010

I asked Priya, my Bettakurumba friend, to record her own observations. Here are her ethnographic notes:

I danced with tribals womens [sic]. I made chapattis. Claudia taught me retail management. I fetched water from the river. There was an elephant. I was afraid. For dinner I ate rice with chilli and omelette.

Even though multiple and/or collaborative authorship remains an aspiration for most PhD researchers, I tried to implement this during my fieldwork, and believe it should be established as ethnographic standard, especially in research contexts involving indigenous/tribal and other disadvantaged and marginalised people.

Narrative pitfalls

In the opening chapter I referred to storytelling as a central form of Adivasi cultural expression. In the following chapters I critique the essentialisation that the activists' depiction of Adivasis is often subject to. By focusing my analysis on the activists' narratives, and in turn on their rendering of Adivasis' narratives, I am aware of the potential danger of essentialising Adivasi communities as chiefly oral ones. It is thus worth reiterating that, as

much as storytelling represents one of many forms of Adivasi cultural idioms, stories are one of many Development "tools" the activists have developed over the years. Similarly, I am cognisant that my analytic focus on supposedly tribal "values" in the activists' stories could in fact reify these notions of Adivasi values. It is thus worth bearing in mind that critique of essentialisation is an analytic tightrope walk, ever prone to in turn essentialising what it seeks to critique.

Ethnographic incompleteness

I conclude my methodological reflections by emphasising what may be obvious, but merits repeating nevertheless in my opinion – that there is no one "real" understanding of the Gudalur Adivasi movement, and that everyone has a different perspective to offer, depending on their social, economic, political, ethnic, professional etc. background, motives, and interests in the movement. Accordingly, I am cognisant of the fact that I was doing this research for a PhD influenced the way I chose to represent AMS/ACCORD and the Adivasis involved with them.

The act of ethnographic research is fraught with, and goes hand in hand with an acknowledgement of the incompleteness and fragmentarity of access, participation, observation, insight, and understanding, notably at the research outset and during fieldwork. The real value of the reams and reams of collected "data" often does not come into its own until the ethnographer is faced with the task of analysis, i.e. of turning the unhusked data into palatable findings.

Of the many reminders of this inchoateness encountered during research, the following story perhaps encapsulates it best. It is a Paniya story as told by Chathi (AMS/ACCORD N.D.-a), an AMS activist and animator of the first hour. He is an actor and storyteller, a *cheenam* (flute) virtuoso, and *koratti nadagam* master (a traditional theatre form). Most notable is his wry sense of humour. Often though, his alcoholism gets the better of him…

There were two Paniyas living in the middle of the forest. Velukkan told Chemban, "I am very hungry. I need food." Chemban answered, "There is some land, let's clear it and grow some rice." They cleared the land. Velukkan repeated, "I am very hungry." Chemban said, "O.k., let's plough the field." They ploughed the field. Velukkan persisted, "I want something to eat." Chemban answered, "We'll sow the grain." They sowed the grain. Velukkan was desperate, "What about food?" Chemban replied, "Let the paddy grow." The paddy grew. They harvested it, they threshed it, they pounded it, they husked it. At every interval Velukkan cried, "I need something to eat." Finally the rice was cooked. Chemban proudly filled a plate and brought to Velukkan. "You were hungry. Here's our rice. Eat it…"

But Velukkan did not respond. He was already dead.

*

A blog postscript

Fieldwork masala, a fieldwork blog: http://claudturtle.wordpress.com/

*

Interlude

Having shed light on the inner mechanics of this ethnography, I, the ethnographer, now clear the stage for the main protagonists of this story, the Adivasis and the Development activists engaged with them. This thesis continues with the first ethnographic chapter, “Stories of Adivasi self-reliance”, an overview of the theory and practice undergirding AMS/ACCORD’s comprehensive drive for Adivasi economic self-reliance.

STORIES OF ADIVASI SELF-RELIANCE

"Self-reliance = a pact of economic non-aggressiveness."
Johan Galtung

Chapter map:

Part I

A story of Adivasi development in Gudalur

The ACCORD "family" – Adivasi "development on their own terms"

Part II

A story of "poetic justice": Adivasi self-reliance through tea

Part III

Just Change – a story about a community trading network

Prelude

Having mapped out the methodological coordinates, the aim of this first ethnographic chapter, "Stories of Adivasi self-reliance", is chiefly a descriptive one. First, in Part I, I briefly introduce the history of AMS/ACCORD and the key players of the AMS/ACCORD/JC "family" network in India and globally. Secondly, in Part II, I provide an ethnographic outline of AMS/ACCORD's self-reliance agenda for Gudalur's Adivasis. Thirdly, in Part III, I discuss the operationalisation thereof, in theory and practice, through the Just Change concept.

Part I

A story of Adivasi development in Gudalur

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."
Attributed to Margaret Mead

The story of AMS/ACCORD's self-reliance drive goes as follows. In terms of community organisation, AMS/ACCORD have, over the course of the past 30 years (since Stan and Mari Thekaekara's arrival in the Nilgiris in 1984), mobilised and organised the Adivasi communities of the Gudalur valley, the Betta- and Mullukurumba, Kattunayakan, Paniya, and at one point also the Irular, in order to improve their self- esteem and assert their right to land. Without doubt, the organisation has brought a drastic change for the better to the lives of many tribal people in the region. They do, however, perceive these gains to be under threat, as

more and more people are falling into debt and are failing to make ends meet. They are also finding it harder to mobilise people, as they were able to do in the past, because a single issue, such as land, affecting all the tribes in all the villages is lacking today.

When ACCORD started their work in 1986, the tribal communities of the region were dependent on the daily wage economy – if they did not go for work for one day, they would either have to buy rice on credit or go without food that day. This has been a thing of the past for some time now, as the majority of people managed to obtain a certain amount of land through the sangam and the land rights campaign. One of their surveys estimates that more than 1,400 acres of land had been "reclaimed" as of 2003 (Thekaekara 2003c). More importantly, people have planted it with permanent crops such as tea, coffee, and pepper.

With the crash in tea, coffee, and pepper prices at the end of the 1990s, however, the income from these sources was drastically cut. They found that people were once again beginning to become dependant on coolie work and sliding into debt. They realised that their traditional strategy of grabbing land, which they had employed at the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s, was not likely to work in the new millennium because there was very little land left to grab, and income from land had decreased considerably. When they analysed their economic situation at the turn of the century they realised that their prime concern was not income generation any more, as the average family income had gone up from Rs. 600 in 1986 to approx. Rs. 2,500, but that their income was flowing straight out of their pockets, and thus the local economy, as soon as they earned it. While in the past nearly all the goods they consumed were produced locally, they were now buying most of it from shops and these in turn from international companies.

They surmised that, if they were to prevent their economic situation from sliding back to what it was in 1986, they would have to take collective action again, like during the initial years, because the introduction of new programmes to increase the income of individual families would not suffice any more. They knew they were vulnerable when they participated in the economy as individuals. This led them to form the Adivasi Tea Leaf Marketing Society in order to get a fair price for their tea leaf, honey, and pepper. From the idea to (re)establish a collective local economy emerged "Just Change" (JC) – an alternative trading system that would directly link poor communities in trade. JC aims to "plug the leaks", from which money flows out of local communities, as much as possible, by trading in as many goods as possible, so that the profits stay within the community and, from whatever does flow out, as much as possible flows to other poor communities instead of multinational companies.

This trajectory of AMS/ACCORD is similar to that of other land rights campaign-based movements. Flynn (2013: 19), for the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, or MST, Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement, charts an ideological evolution very similar to that of AMS/ACCORD since the 1980s up to the present:

> Without doubt the MST's ideological adversaries have evolved since 1984. Initially large landowners were the enemy but the list has expanded to include the mass media, Nestlé, Monsanto, agribusiness and finally, neoliberalism itself. Equally, movement policy has shifted over time, from a basic premise to combat the inequality of landholdings in Brazil, to an engagement with the inequalities of capitalism, to a confrontation with agribusiness and global financial systems of capital and latterly to a commitment to organic farming and agroecology.

Also, AMS/ACCORD have to be seen as emerging from within the wider framework of identity-based movements appearing from the 1980s onward. As Steur (2011a: 74) writes,

> [i]f we go beyond the idea that contemporary adivasi resistance is simply the logical historical continuation of an age-old struggle against colonial oppression and are instead sensitive to the broader transformative vision and reworking of stereotypical notions of 'adivasiness' that are proposed by movements such as the AGMS, the question becomes pertinent why this shift from a discursive emphasis on 'class' to the assertion of 'identity' took place.

I now introduce the "family" members of the AMS/ACCORD/JC Development network.

The AMS/ACCORD "family" – Adivasi "development on their own terms"

Action for Community Organisation, Rehabilitation and Development (ACCORD)

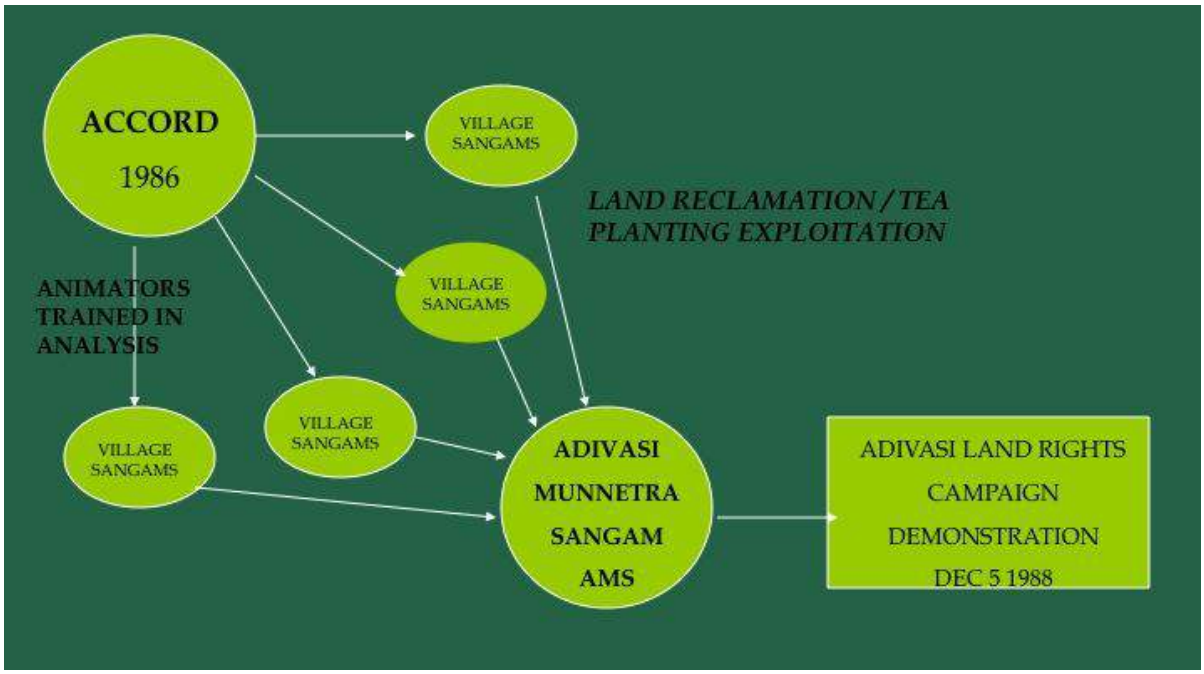

Illustration 3 Historical development of AMS/ACCORD. Source: AMS/ACCORD

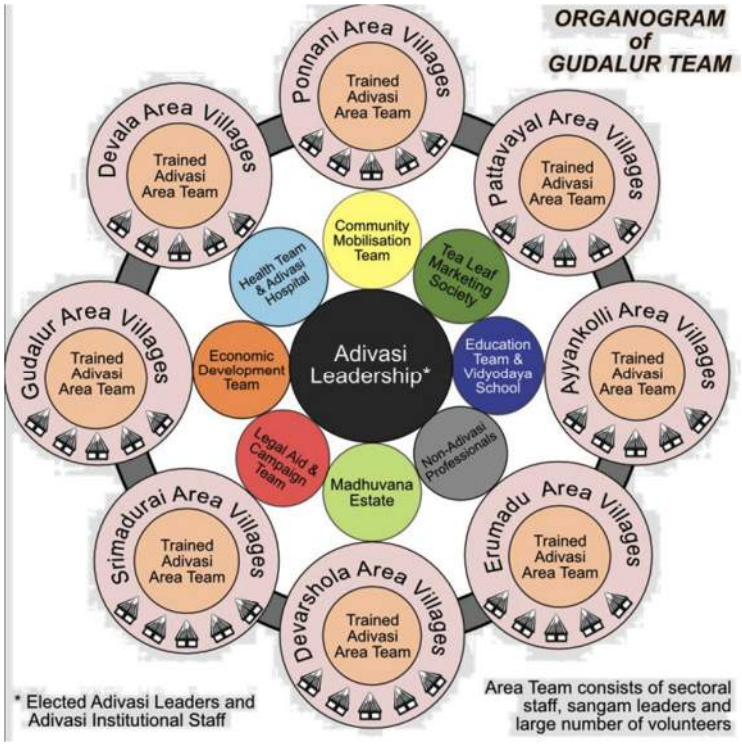

Illustration 4 Organisational chart of Adivasi Munnetra Sangam. Source: AMS/ACCORD

Central to the founding of ACCORD were six initial development worker couples:

But the NGO that we (Stan and Mari) were working with at the time did not want to get involved in contentious issues like land. We had to find an alternative. So along with K.T.Subramanian, a young Moolakurumba tribal we founded ACCORD in March 1986.

We began to look actively for someone who could initiate a health programme for us. In the monsoon of 1987 Drs. Roopa and Narayanan Devadasan from CMC Vellore joined us to start a Community Health Programme training tribal women to take over the community's health.

[…]

If we were able to develop the hospital as an institution that would be owned and controlled by the tribal community then perhaps this would increase their bargaining power with other more powerful communities in the area. So we welcomed the arrival of Drs. Shylaja and Nandakumar Menon in '90 when they came to start the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital. But we were clear that the hospital should have a separate identity from ACCORD. And so, ASHWINI (Association for Health Welfare in the Nilgiris), a registered society was born. This society would run the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital and eventually manage an entire health care system for the tribal community.

[…]

We were upset at the failure of our education programmes because we realised each year lost, was a generation of kids untaught. So finally, in 1991, when Ram and Rama decided to join the team we were overjoyed. The education team has grown by leaps and bounds.

[…]

One problem which was constantly being raised was the acute housing scarcity. In many houses 3 or 4 married couples live together, leading to a great deal of discord and social problems. We had initiated housing experiments in a small way in Kozhikolly in 1988 and in Cheenath in 1990. It was at this juncture that we met Anu and Krishna, a young architect

couple and for the first time thought about the far reaching implications of housing, about problems like sustainability, the future, housing as a continuous, never ending need which would always be with us. Their ideas were exciting and challenging. So their decision to join the team in '92 pleased everyone as they believe in training local crafts people, empowering the building team etc.

[…]

Then Anita Varghese, a young ecologist and her husband Manu Jose, an actor, also joined the team, hoping to develop programmes to protect and conserve the environment. But the culture and traditional knowledge of the tribals is an integral part of environmental conservation. This knowledge and culture was under serious threat. Traditional systems of passing the information from one generation to the next were breaking down. Something had to be done about it. After years of working on this they have finally come up with a strategy for cultural action - which will hopefully lead to the tribals being able to develop a framework within which they manage their development. (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2002)

Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS)

Illustration 5 Organisational overview of a multi-nodal South Indian grassroots tribal Development enterprise. Source: AMS/ACCORD

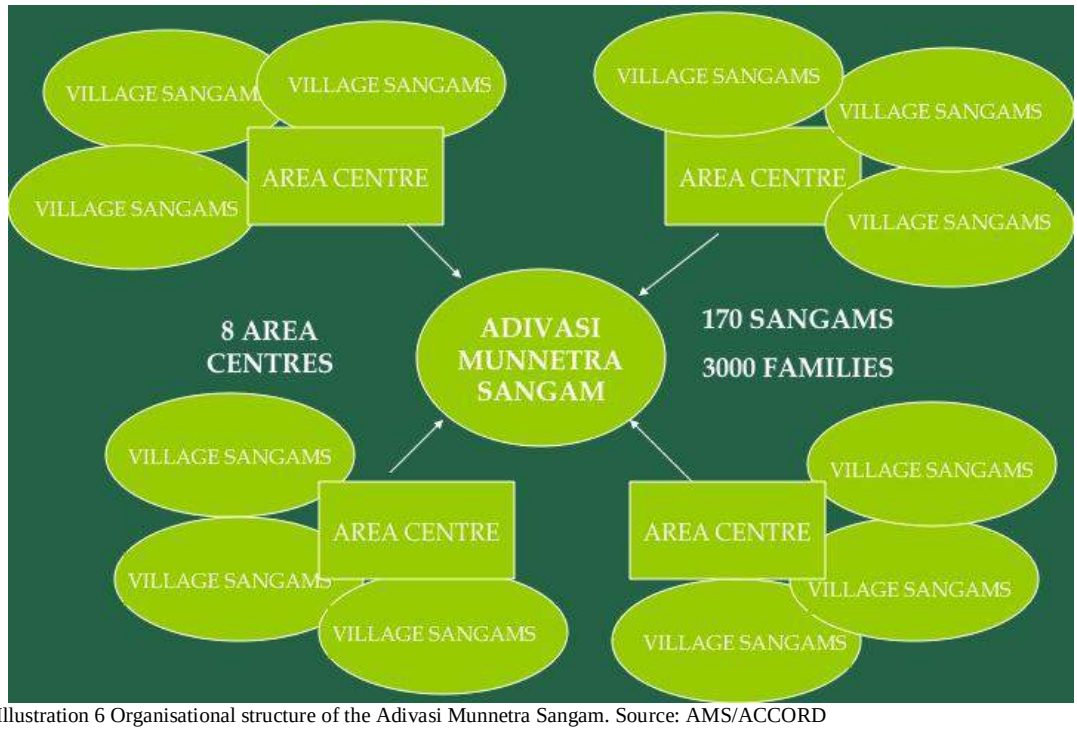

Illustration 6 Organisational structure of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam. Source: AMS/ACCORD

The approx. 18,000 members of the AMS are spread across 197 Adivasi villages divided among the eight panchayats of Gudalur and Pandalur taluks in Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu: Gudalur, Devarshola, Nelliyalam, Cherangode, Mudumalai, Muduguli, O'Valley, and Nellakota.

The AMS is the hub around which Adivasi self-reliance is built. It is supported by a host of satellite service institutions:

Health: Association for Health Welfare in the Nilgiris (ASHWINI) and the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital

ASHWINI runs the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital, the tribal health insurance scheme, and the community health programme through eight sub centres and village-level health guides.

Education: the Vishwa Bharathi Vidyodaya Trust

The Vishwa Bharathi Vidyodaya Trust runs the Vidyodaya Adivasi Study Centre (an introductory video can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUzpEDhAKr4) for tribal children as well as an outreach programme including *balwadis* (crèches) and tuition centres in all the villages covered by the AMS. It is worth noting the Sanskritic name of these institutions, which I will discuss in my analysis of AMS/ACCORD's anti-Hindutva efforts in the sub-chapter "Activist imaginaries of Adivasi indigeneities and their problems" in the chapter "Stories of Chai for Change?" Additionally, Vidyodaya trains tribal youngsters to become teachers in Government Tribal Residential (GTR) Schools.

The rationale and official "founding story" behind Vidyodaya goes as follows:

In 1995, at a Mahasabha of over 200 village leaders, it was decided that the only answer to the problem of education was to have a school owned by the Sangam which recognised Adivasi culture and language. In 1996, Vidyodaya, a small alternate school began taking in Adivasi children. It also took in 12 young Adivasis to train as teachers. The school was not so much to convince the govt about the abilities of Adivasi children as it was to convince the community about their own children. As Adivasi children studied alongside non-Adivasis in Vidyodaya and coped with everything, the community realised what was being denied to them. In the year 2000 the Sangam geared itself to get kids into school. There was no campaign, no drive, and no posters. A ridiculously simple solution was suggested by one of them during a planning session – get the grandmothers and grandfathers to take the children to school! And so for the cost of a cup of tea everyday each village or group of villages appointed an old woman or man from the village to take the children and bring them back. The numbers grew in leaps and bounds from a mere 737 on school rolls in 1999 to over 2781 who actually attend school regularly today. (Ramdas 2012)

On their strategy Ramdas (ibid.) further elaborates:

Now the issue is how to keep them in school. We run camps where children come in batches of 30, discuss their culture, social and economic situation and why it is important for them to preserve their spirituality. They sing songs and tell stories in their language, challenge each other with riddles and finally spend a good part of the night dancing to their music. These camps have made a huge difference to the lives of the children. We have village libraries, basically boxes or cupboards with reading cards, books, puzzles and indoor games. These libraries are located in a house that the village has decided on. Children can sit on the veranda of the house and read or play games.

While the word librarian sounds big, it is usually a school-going child above class 7, who is interested in running this voluntarily. All these student-librarians undergo intensive training on weekends not only to manage the library, but also to tell stories, sing songs, enact stories, help children with their reading and writing. Our approach has been that the problem is that of the community and the solution must also be theirs. They know best what will work and what will not. They have to take responsibility for their community and take it forward. [my emphasis] *Whatever support they require for this, the institution will provide. And the Sangam has responded very positively. They have taken up issues with the teachers and with the govt. about the quality of education. They have seen for themselves what quality education is at Vidyodaya where 100 Adivasi children study.*

The govt. has in turn introduced activity-based learning at primary schools. Where the teachers have taken interest, the children learn well, but in most cases the situation continues to be pathetic. The Vidyodaya school is now a model that shows that given the right ambience, no child will drop out. It provides a non-competitive, non-aggressive atmosphere. Children can speak in their language and learn according to their pace. Elders from the village come to talk about their struggles and the need to preserve their way of life. They tell them stories and teach them songs. We are now in the process of having an interactive cultural centre in the school.

The present education compels the child to straddle two worlds and do well in both. This is not easy as all of us know. The community elders are afraid that as children go to school it will be at the cost of their culture. This is indeed a challenge for us – preserving the dignity of a people while giving them the wherewithal to survive and prosper in an alien culture. [my emphasis]

In the ActionAid Chembakolli education pack Surendiren, Vidyodaya's Mullukurumba headmaster, describes AMS/ACCORD's education initiatives, and the changes it has brought about, thus:

Surendiren talks about education (2008)

At first, ACCORD's education programme started balwadis (nurseries) at the village level. These were for small children aged two to three.

When the AMS was set up, that was a crucial time. Now, we had the unity to discuss issues. We decided a first step would be to make sure everyone in the villages had a basic awareness of education.

The AMS leaders got together to discuss how to do this. First, it was decided to have volunteer education workers visiting villages and talking about education. Then, in 1996 the decision was taken to set up an Adivasi school in Gudalur (Vidyodaya).

I was one of 14 volunteer teachers enrolled from the beginning. Before the school opened we had a training programme for two years. We learnt about all the ideas of a school such as management and subjects every day for two years. Ramdas and Rama trained us.

One of the main changes today is that Vidyodaya School is run by tribal people. The Chembakolli community are now very aware of education.

A main thing is that the parents do not have any background in education. So, they have changed more than their children, especially the Kattunayakan tribe. There has been a huge change in that community. At first no Kattunayakan's wanted to send their children to school. Now, it is mostly Kattunayakan children here.

The community has come forward and taken responsibility for their education. Now parents want to enrol their children. This is an enormous change. We did a lot of work at the beginning. We visited the villages and met with the parents about education. We appointed education coordinators for each area.

We would say, "If you want to live freely, you need education. If your children are educated, people cannot cheat you. They cannot grab your land." This is especially for the Kattunnaickens who depend most on the forest.

Before, we were living off the forest. But now it is owned by the government we cannot get medicines from there. We learnt the skills needed for everyday survival from our parents and old people. Without the forest, we need education now to give us the skills to fight for our freedom.

Now our forest is going and our land is getting destroyed, we come to the shops and buy. We need to know about counting, saving [As Mosse (2011: 163) notes, "[n]othing symbolise[s] the transformation from tribal 'hand-to-mouth' underdevelopment to self-reliance better than the 'moral discipline' of saving".], *how to take good care of yourself. We need to know how to get a different job. We realised that with the forest changing around us, we needed education to help us with the outside world.*

You cannot see education as separate. It is one part of the whole community. Our lifestyle has had to change and education gives us the skills to survive. It covers all parts of our life. It links to health and how we see diseases.

Education is not just about studying books. At Vidyodaya we try to bring in our culture and forest information. This education is based on Adivasi life before. For the tribal communities, land is most important so our education starts with this.

The children study Adivasi singing, dancing, music, house-building, honey-collecting. Community leaders come in to school and teach us. Now, we are looking at our tribal history in social studies, food crops and local forest maps.

Yes, we're 100% worried what will happen when the children leave (school). This school is our tribal family. It is so important for us that they are confident. These children feel free now. They have helped their parents and grandparents feel free.

Personally, I shifted from village to Gudalur. I am a strong culture person so I go home to the village as much as possible. Communication is the biggest change in my life. More information is available. I am speaking English with new people globally.

Thinking ahead is another big change for us. In the village I would only think about today. What will we eat today, what will we do? Now, I am thinking ahead and planning. It is a new concept. We're looking to the future with hope.

We also have more than 70 village libraries in place with books, puzzles and games. It helps children to keep an interest in school activities during the holidays. More than 50% of our libraries are managed by children in class 6. They often have them in their homes and it becomes a place where all the children can gather.

Cultures constantly change, whether we like it or not. We need an Adivasi study group to decide what things we want to change, and what cultures we want to take things from. This is a tricky area because, does school learning mean leaving your culture and community? I hope that will not happen. I do not want that to happen.

Most of the children in Chembakolli go to school, although some stay at home and help their parents. Of those that go to school, some attend Vidyodaya Adivasi school while others go to a government Adivasi school in nearby Kanjikolly. Government schools for Adivasi children are poorly resourced and it is common for teachers to turn up to register the children (as this ensures they get paid) and leave without teaching them. (ActionAid and ACCORD 2009)

Economy: the Madhuvana tea estate and Adivasi Tea Leaf Marketing (ATLM)

The Madhuvana Plantations Project[10] comprises a 176-acre tea, coffee, and medicinal herbs plantation purchased by ACCORD with a loan from Charities Advisory Trust, UK, which is being paid off by the Adivasi Tee Projekt, Germany, to provide local, long-term sustainable funding. The plantation is managed by the Adivasis themselves and employs around 100 members of the AMS.

Flynn (2013: 11), writing on the signification of land in Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement, observes that "it should be noted that this strategy envisages and encompasses only agricultural produce, crucially configuring land as a resource to be planted, rather than exploited as, for example, commercial premises." In contrast to this, AMS/ACCORD does use land for tea production, but configures it also as a site for commercial enterprises, such as eco-tourism, thus choosing a mixed-use approach.

The Adivasi Economic Development and Marketing Society runs a 400-member tea leaf marketing cooperative, as well as a smaller honey and pepper cooperative.

[10] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKWVULbYsqw and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-MiY4V7qnI.

AMS/ACCORD further comprises units responsible for disaster management, finance (banking and community currencies), community mobilisation/animator training, and the producer-consumer-investor cooperative Just Change described in detail below.

Links with other "like-minded" organisations in India

As described in the previous chapter, I originally started out researching Adivasi land rights conflicts, but quickly became more interested in the Adivasi activists themselves, thus eventually conducting a meta-research of indigenous rights activism, and the nature of their varied connections with other like-minded activists and organisations in India and across the world. It is these connections, and the relationships thus maintained, that form the foundation of their Development network. Significantly, AMS/ACCORD maintains close ties involving mutual information, know-how, and staff exchanges with only an exclusive number of different environmental and rural development organisations. This is in line with AMS/ACCORD's concern about self-representation to other NGOs and other key stakeholders in the region. The most important ones are Keystone Foundation (http://keystone-foundation.org/) based in Kotagiri/Nilgiris, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) (http://www.atree.org/) with its base in Bangalore, Kalpavriksh Environment Action Group in Pune (http://www.kalpavriksh.org/), where I interviewed members Neema Pathak and Arshya Bose in July 2009, and Thulir (http://www.thulir.org/wp/), a "tribal centre for learning" in Sittilingi, Dharmapuri District, Tamil Nadu.

International supporters and partners: donors, development agencies, charities, and think-and-do tanks

Undoubtedly, it is AMS/ACCORD's international connections that have played a significant role in the relative success of their land rights campaigns and self-reliance strategies, not only in terms of financial assistance, but also the social and political capital accompanying local-global connections.

Next to its main institutional donor in India, the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, AMS/ACCORD have close funding, community, and knowledge-exchange links with a number of organisations and individuals internationally. In Germany, AMS/ACCORD have links, historically, to the Evangelische Studentengemeinde (Heidelberg) (http://www.esg-heidelberg.de/), members of which went on to found the Adivasi Tee Projekt (http://www.Adivasi-tee-projekt.org/index.php) (spread across Germany with its one salaried project manager, Petra Bursee, based in Potsdam and its seat in Kamen, Westphalia).

Equally close links exist with the UK: ActionAid (see the Chembakolli case study below); Oxfam (with Stan having formerly been a trustee); Hilary Blume and the Charities Advisory Trust (http://www.charitiesadvisorytrust.org.uk/), who used to run the course "Development from the Inside" in Mysore, convened by the Gudalur activists (I participated in the penultimate one in 2009), and the Good Gifts Programme connected to it (http://www.goodgifts.org/); and Christian Aid. Further UK links AMS/ACCORD have established in the past are with the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at the Säid Business School, University of Oxford (https://skollworldforum.org/contributor/stan-thekaekara/), Joel Joffe (JC kickstarted its operations with a grant from his foundation), Marion and James Bruges of the RH Southern Trust (Bruges 2008, with a chapter on Just Change), the New Economics Foundation (NEF) (http://www.neweconomics.org/), the Ireland-based Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability (FEASTA) (http://www.feasta.org/documents/review2/thekaekara2.htm), Christopher and Phyllida Purvis of Links Japan, Nat Sloane of the Impetus Trust, and Journeys for Change.

Key to AMS/ACCORD's relationships with donors is their central strategy of adding value by building personal relationships through trading stories, as described by Stan (Thekaekara 2003b):

When chalking out the requirements we must not only look at reporting requirements – we should go beyond and make a list of things we can do to further and strengthen our relationship with them – eg sending them a newsletter, Christmas new year greetings, special event information like festival, someone travelling visiting them – eg I was in Mumbai met SRTT for JC proposal – and though we were really rushed for time we made it a point to meet Amrita since she is handling VTBT. This part I think is very important. WE HAVE TO MAKE SURE THAT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DONORS GOES BEYOND JUST THE MINIMUM REQUIRED REPORTS AND FOCUSSES ON BUILDING PERSONAL LINKS AND TIES WITH KEY INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THESE ORGANISATIONS. [emphasis in original] *This can be a pain because they have such a high turn over of staff but it cannot be helped.*

In order to illustrate the nature of AMS/ACCORD's relationships with its international parters, I now concentrate on a case study analysing AMS/ACCORD's relationship with ActionAid and their joint "Chembakolli" project.

AMS/ACCORD and ActionAid

ActionAid has been AMS/ACCORD's longest-standing international institutional donor. This, however, is not to say that the relationship has not been fraught with dissonances at times:

For reasons that are still unclear to us ACTIONAID decided to stop funding ACCORD and we were hard put to find resources from wherever possible. The cessation of ACTIONAID funding has had its own negative impact on the work here especially in terms of enabling us to get greater control over the entire process of change and development. The biggest advantage of AA funding was that it was holistic and the nature and type of funding allowed us to decentralise our planning and budgeting giving a lot more control and ownership to the community both at the village and Area level. We had reached a stage where planning, budgets, decisions on expending the budget, monitoring and reporting were all devolved down to the Area level.

However, once we switched to a multiple donor mode, it became nearly impossible to continue with this exercise - as it is impossible to have fractured, sectoral planning at the village or Area level. The planning and budgeting exercise became more centralised with the sectoral teams raising funds from varied sources and opportunities that sprang up. This meant that the community has slowly begun to slide from owners of the process of change to beneficiaries of service provision. We do not for a moment imagine that the nature of funding was the sole reason for this. All of society works against a process of giving power to the people - what we have been able to do because of the nature of funding from AA was to use this funding as a means to develop the power of the community. This was a very important tool and its loss has contributed to the people losing control. (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2000a)

Case study: Chembakolli and ActionAid

Ferguson (1994) argues that development projects cannot simply create a desired result, but instead have a number of unexpected consequences. An example for this is the AMS/ACCORD collaboration with ActionAid on the Chembakolli education pack for the UK primary school curriculum. Chembakolli is a mixed tribal village about half an hour's drive from Gudalur. Its founding story goes as follows:

Chembakolli land rights – and wrongs

Marigan, Chair of the AMS, says:

'We came here in 1988. We did not have any option but to settle here. All of us were without land in different places and so we came here to get this land. It is our only way of living.

We are Adivasi – the word means 'original settlers of India'. Once the forest was ours. All of us lived in the forest. This was our forest. Then the Forest Department came with all these rules to forbid us to go into the forest, which was our own forest. There are so many rules and regulations now.

In the old days we were all bonded labourers, but since we came here we have been our own masters. We do not have to report to anybody.

When we were bonded labourers we lived in our own huts in the forest. We still had the freedom to go and hunt and to collect honey, grasses for thatch and food from the forest. There were fewer people here then and the forest rules did not apply to us.

We used to move around the forest but in the last 15 years most Adivasis have settled in one place as we do not have anywhere else to go. We do not have an option. We feel a little bit trapped. Before, we would never have stayed so close to one another.

We did not have this idea of owning land – 'this is mine, that is mine'. Wherever we went, if we found a suitable place, we stayed there. The leaders decided it was a good place if there was water and other things we needed. Some think it is better now that we have our own land, though.

If it was not for our sangams we might still be bonded labourers. We have more prosperity now.

I went to Madras once to meet a government minister to talk about the land problem here. I enjoyed going there, but I like this place. We need open spaces. We need to look at forest. We have so much in the forest – trees, bamboo. It is part of our lives.

We did not have a fixed way of dividing the land in Chembakolli. We formed a committee and we decided that each family should take what they needed. Whoever planted land had that land and as much as they liked. It depended on how much each family thought they could cultivate. Some people have 0.5 – 1 hectare. We took what we needed.

After we came here the land was declared 'reserve forest' and that's when the trouble started with the Forest Department. About 12 forest guards came in a jeep and started cutting down our crops and trees such as the murikku (which supports the pepper vines), and destroying coffee plants.

I went and phoned the ACCORD office. A big group of people came from their work in the fields. But the guards would not listen to us; only when the panchayat chairman came and made them stop. The chairman is a Muslim and is very supportive, he helps us a lot. He came down and started shouting at the forest guards, saying: 'They are Adivasis and you should not come and attack them. You have no right.' After a lot of arguing they stopped.

I said to the guards, 'You cannot come here and do this. We have planted all this with hard work, our sweat and our labour. You have no right to do this'. They told me, 'You mind your own business, this is our job to see that you people do not encroach on the forest so we have to cut all this down. It is not your land, it is forest land'.

I said to one of them: 'Why are you picking on us, there are so many others doing the same.' He said: 'Those people are on revenue land, you people are on forest land.' But there are non-tribal farmers on the same land and they were not touched. Just over the fence from one of the plots that was attacked there are non-tribal crops. Every bit of forest has been cleared there. There are many non-tribals on forest land but they are not attacked because they pay bribes, between 10-20,000 rupees.

Soman and Leela lost all their murikku trees and 500 pepper vines. They were completely destroyed. Their vines were 2-5 years old and it takes 5 years before they crop, so it will take them 5 years to recover.

Soman is working for others now. Leela went too but she cannot go any longer as she's 7 months pregnant. They'll replant after the monsoon (in June) and people will help and donate cuttings.

There was no violence from our side.

Six families had their crops damaged. One guard was very abusive and we have filed a case against him under the 'Atrocities Act'.

When we filed the case we had publicity about the incident in the local Malayam and Hindu Papers. Also the Collector sent the Revenue Divisional Officer down here. The Superintendent of Police sent his assistant too. Both the Collector and the Superintendent say the forest guards were wrong to attack us and have promised to take action.

I do not think we'll get justice at the local level we will have to go to higher courts. We went to Ooty to file the case. The man concerned has been very quiet since, he has not abused anyone else since the article in 'The Hindu'.

We will make sure that we will win the case as we will all fight together with the sangam.

We have to be united to resist the forest department. But we are all working so it is difficult to get people to the place being attacked. We've decided that next time we must all get together and resist them but it will be difficult to get word to everyone quickly. We have a plan to go to Madras and meet the Forest Conservator, Mr Chitrapu, who was here 12 years ago when we came to Chembakolli. He was very supportive then and we hope he can help now that he is so important.

The guard should be sacked. He has not come back here since. Once he said to Badichi: 'You, you are a panchayat member – cannot you at least dress decently?' She was wearing her traditional clothes. She said: 'I know how to dress.'

Forest officials want us to relocate to Ayyankolli, 40km away. They said the Forest Department will put up houses for us there.

Everybody is very angry still. (ActionAid and ACCORD 2009)

Chembakolli was initially conceptualised "purely to inform UK children about a distant culture" and as "revenue generation for ACCORD" (Thekaekara 2010c). Then over time to "inform Adivasi children about UK culture" (ibid.). The rationale and potential they saw in the Chembakolli endeavour revolved around the considerations that "in today's global interconnected world [they could] do more than just 'inform'", i.e. they could "educate" in a way that could "impact on children's thinking/values and the kind of citizens they become". In addition, given the global concern with climate change, "Adivasi low carbon lives can offer many lessons". Typical online representations of Adivasi indigeneity in connection with Chembakolli can, for instance, be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljwFSoo46zw and www.chembakolli.com.

Several different unfavourable incidents and developments, however, prompted AMS/ACCORD to rethink the Chembakolli concept and setup. Interestingly, the official and informal representation thereof differ though. The official reasons read thus: according to AMS/ACCORD, Chembakolli had become "a bit static" and "too many similar resources [were already] out there", of which many are free. They had not fully tapped into the potential of the exchange of cultures and revenue was coming down as subscription was decreasing. Plus, there was the feeling that Internet content should be free. They felt they had a "unique 'brand' highly recognised in the UK, but were not capitalising on it" – a statement framed in highly capitalistic parlance.

To implement this rethink they planned to initiate "Beyond Chembakolli" or "Chembakolli continued". At the time, Chembakolli was only a one-off education intervention targeting eight-year-old school children. As a reboot, they wanted to come up

with programmes for children that engage them with the Adivasis and what happens in Gudalur over the school year. In the area of environmental studies they planned to develop resources around Adivasis and the notion of carbon footprint, forests, the lantana furniture making project, the medicinal plant project, and honey collection in the wild. In economics they sought to develop resources around Just Change, Fair Trade, local economies, ATLM, and honey marketing. In citizenship and life they sought to build resources around the AMS, land rights, forest rights, and cultural resources around music, dancing, and food. Furthermore, they pursued the idea of "Chembakolli Live", along the lines of the model Adivasi hut the Adivasi Tee Projekt had built in Germany, by creating a model Chembakolli in Marsh Farm (see below in "Key JCUK players") and/or the Eden Project, as a place where children (of all ages including grownups) could participate interactively and physically take part in activities. The idea of school gardens, along the lines of the Eden project "Gardens for Life", also came up, i.e. to encourage children in the UK and India to garden ("reconnect with nature" in the activists' words). As envisioned, the Chembakolli website eventually became free, with a few ideas exchanged at the time on how the revenue from it could be replaced by revenue from a number of spin-off activities, for example students starting coops and selling the tea, Chembakolli live visits, and children publishing a book on gardens. In terms of partners they were considering drawing in several different potential partners in the UK to share expertise, networks, and funding: the New Economics Foundation for expertise on local economies, the afore-mentioned Eden Project, and JCUK on Fair Trade. At the time, they were still banking on JCUK volunteers being a viable resource they could tap into. Considering the reduction in numbers and enthusiasm of JCUK volunteers described below, however, this was unlikely even at the time.

These official ideas aside, however, informally, I was told that one of the real reasons for their rethink on Chembakolli were unsanctioned visits to Chembakolli by "foreigners". Outside interactions and dissemination of information naturally engender outside interference, as seen in the (unsolicited) increase in touristic traffic to Chembakolli not welcomed by AMS/ACCORD. Rendering cultural information accessible naturally creates an interest to "see for oneself", on the part of those with the means to access it. Considerations of sensitivity or respect are often thrown over board in favour of the experience of "having been there and seen it". Mari explained to me that for Adivasis the whole of their village constitutes private space, and not just their houses that they mostly use for sleeping. The analogy she used was one of "a foreigner just entering your living room uninvited". In the case of Chembakolli, this led to the imposition of restrictions (in the form of an explanatory

note in the teaching pack, asking for respect of Adivasis' privacy, and prior contact with AMS/ACCORD before visiting Chembakolli), and the decision to change marketing strategy in order to deflect attention away from Chembakolli only. As a consequence, access to the villages was closely guarded and restricted to certain people, such as funders (both Indian and foreign), Indian scientists, and doctors (through the hospital):

We have come a long way to reach the point of this visit. Chembakolli is a very fragile community. The AMS discussed the idea at length, and are now more confident at dealing with outside issues.

We've restricted the number of people to be careful at not making Chembakolli a museum. (ActionAid and ACCORD 2009)

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From Chembakolli and AMS/ACCORD, and its associated "family" members, in Part I, the focus now shifts, in Part II, to the socio-economic backdrop against which AMS/ACCORD developed their self-reliance strategy.

Part II

A story of "poetic justice": Adivasi self-reliance through tea

"Story runs on poetic justice, or at least on our hopes for it."
Jonathan Gottschall (2012: 132)

"So is it possible to offer tribal peoples any truly beneficial development? Yes, if we accept their right to reject what we, with our 'advanced' wisdom, can give; we have to stop thinking them childish when they make decisions we would not. Everyone wants control over their future, and not everyone wants the same things out of life, but such truisms are hardly ever applied."
Mari Marcel Thekaekara (1989b)

Having acquainted the reader with the AMS/ACCORD/JC "family" in India and globally, I now turn to an overview of AMS/ACCORD's ideological underpinnings in relation to the issues and institutions that have – over the years – led them to develop their current economic rationale – their drive for tribal economic self-reliance chiefly through tea production, and the resultant transformation of tribal people into tea producers. These, the activists' ideas, I elucidate mainly through the stories they tell. This second part is divided into two sections, "Conflict" and "Resistance". In "Conflict" I discuss, first, the theoretical background to the power relations central to the land alienation experienced by Adivasis, and then describe the

two main loci around, and through which Adivasis experience conflict on a day-to-day basis: land and government. In "Resistance" I detail Adivasis' responses to conflict, and here in particular AMS/ACCORD's long-term strategy for tribal self-reliance. This segues into the third section on Just Change.

Conflict

Central to any analysis of conflict is the scrutiny of its underlying power relations.

Power

For my analysis of the asymmetrical power relations constituting the everyday conflicts surrounding land in Gudalur I draw on Lukes (1974), Mintz (1985), Haynes and Prakash (1992), Guha (1997), Colchester (2000), Gledhill (2000), and take the later Foucauldian view of power (Dreyfus, Rabinow et al. 1983). Here power is conceptualised as a process, and not as a locatable entity or a substance that people can possess. Power exists only in its exercise, which penetrates all social relations. It does not simply flow from top-to-bottom, but is diffuse and all-permeating. Power is not necessarily a zero-sum game, but potentially generative. The latter idea of power opens up the idea of resistance, and it is this type of power wielded by subordinated groups, and the role stories can play as "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1985, 1990), in the exercise of this power, by subverting the dominant system and its scripts, that form the analytic focus in this chapter.

I also draw on Bourdieu's ideas on capital and power (Harker, Mahar et al. 1990). Here, actors and institutions operate within a cultural field, bounded by power relations that have a basis in various forms of interchangeable capital. Power relations are exercised through the possession of capital. Economic capital forms the basis of all power relations. Other important forms of capital are symbolic capital (including prestige, status, and authority) and cultural capital (culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns). Symbolic capital "carries with it the power to name, the power to represent commonsense and above all the power to create the 'official version of the world'" (Harker et al, 1990: 13). Power relations between individuals or groups are not merely imposed by external structures, and agents have the ability to reflect on their actions and to strategise. This leads to shifts and modifications in the field, and in the implicit rules and institutions through which power relations operate. However, such shifts are likely to be gradual, constrained by the fact that dominant groups, who control symbolic capital, have the authority to define authentic forms of capital, and thus to maintain the bases of their power through a form of "structural violence", which serves to perpetuate the status

quo as the natural order of things. In relation to Adivasis, this is chiefly played out in the access to and control over land.

Land

Historically, British colonisation and exploitation of tribal land led to unrest among Adivasis. This was the starting point of more than 75 Adivasi uprisings, rebellions, revolts, riots, and movements during colonial rule, such as the Mal Paharia Uprising of 1772, the Bhil Revolt of 1809, the Naik Revolt of 1838 in Gujarat, the Santal Hul (1855-57), and the Birsa Munda Movement (1874-1901) (see Bijoy 2003, Hardiman 1992, 1995).

The process of decolonisation did not prove to be of much benefit to tribal peoples in India since – despite the legal reforms and the constitutional protection they now theoretically enjoyed – they continued to live under the same colonial patterns after independence as during British rule. Only now, India was officially a democracy, dictated by the law of the free market, and the rules of multinational corporations, since the "liberalisation" of the Indian economy in 1991. Prabhu (2004) aptly terms this state of affairs "internal colonialism".

The strength of Adivasi resistance to land alienation today lies in their active campaigning, the development of strategies against expropriation, and the formation of rights-based movements. Adivasis' "counter-hegemonic" and "anti-systemic" (Arrighi et al. 1989) strategies are as diverse as their communities, and range from civil disobedience, political lobbying, demonstrations, strikes, and roadblocks to land occupation and hunger strikes. Recent examples of national and regional movements and organisations engaged in the fight for Adivasi land rights, to name but a few, include the National Front for Tribal Self-Rule, the All India Coordinating Forum of the Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples, the Bharat Jan Andolan, the Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha and the Muthanga movement in Kerala, the Nagarhole Budakattu Hakku Sthapana Samithi (Nagarhole Rights Restoration Forum), the Campaign for Survival and Dignity, and various movements in Jharkhand.

I have previously argued that conflicts surrounding tribal livelihoods are a case of needs- and interest-oriented conflicts, with land representing the central resource around which conflicts revolve (Aufschnaiter 2009). India at the beginning of the 21st century is marked by a scarcity and mismanagement of resources such as arable land. Wayanad District, Kerala's northern, most "tribal" state (see Ravi Raman (2002, 2004) on power in Adivasi land relations in Kerala), and the adjoining lower half of the Nilgiris, where I conducted my fieldwork, are prime examples for this. The decades since the 1940s have seen waves of impoverished

settlers migrating from the overcrowded plains to the relatively sparsely populated, fertile highlands. In the process, these settlers evicted prior inhabitants from their ancestral lands by more or less illicit means, such as the forgery of land documentation and tax declarations, the bribery of government officials, and the introduction of alcohol in Adivasi areas. It is against this backdrop that AMS/ACCORD started its campaign of land reclamation in the area in 1986. As was to be expected, right from the beginning they encountered opposition from the government.

Government

The ambivalence that characterises AMS/ACCORD's relationship with the government is expressed in the following story of Mari and Stan's:

Our entire strategy for service delivery was based on getting the community to eventually access government services. We figured that if the community had the confidence and skills to access government services, they would not need an NGO to intervene.

Following the December '88 demonstration, there was a backlash from the government with intelligence officials visiting our office and questioning everyone. Then suddenly out of the blue, Stan received a National Youth Award for service to the poor from the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Immediately, the same intelligence officers who had been ordered by the District Collector to send a bad report about our "subversive" activities now had to send a good report about our "wonderful" work for the poor! This was followed by a visit of the ACCORD team to Delhi to meet Rajiv Gandhi which was a feather in the cap for all the team and carried forward the elation which was the post December '88 mood.

The volume of development activity was enhanced because after the Rajiv Gandhi meeting in Delhi, the PM passed on the AMS demands to Madras. The team was met by the Minister for Adi Dravida Welfare, Dr. E. Ramakrishnan who assured them of his support. He visited Gudalur and met tribal leaders. He also promised and sent us the most supportive, pro-active collector we've ever had - Collector G.A. Rajkumar. This had a profound impact locally on the lives of the Gudalur tribals. Rajkumar instructed local officials to give possession certificates to all Adivasis for their land. This radically changed their legal status with regard to land. Rajkumar also made information regarding government welfare schemes freely available to the poor. So there was a spate of loans and government schemes for people to dip into.

Suddenly the animators seemed to be working almost as if they were extension agents of the government. This had a plus and minus side. On the one hand, our aim was to get people to a position where they could demand and access government schemes. But on the other, the heavy development burden took away from the activist work. And the tension of walking the tightrope between activism and development was further heightened. It took us a couple of years before we were able to evolve a strategy that reconciled these apparently conflicting approaches to social change. In the meantime, our focus continued on development activity as people became increasingly aware of the possible choices open to them to improve the quality of their lives.

In '93, a group of sangam leaders went to Madras. A meeting was organised at Loyola College with the Minister and key government officials of the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department of the government of Tamilnadu. Shri Murugaraj, Secretary for Adi

Dravidar and Tribal Welfare, was impressed and moved by the tribal sangam leaders. "I have money here you can use," he told them. "Give me a Master Plan so that every one of your people is given the opportunity to earn an income of Rs. 2500 a month. That would be real development." The leaders came back jubilant and exhilarated and the entire taluk was plunged into a frenzy of planning. For us, it seemed like a brilliant opportunity to begin the great ACCORD pull out. This was what we had planned and plotted for, since 1986, so we were euphoric. The planning exercise was meticulous and detailed - taking into account all the needs of each family. It took months to work it out. At the end it was professionally presented, printed and bound, and with a great flourish taken to Madras. Then, the great anti-climax - Shri Murugaraj had been transferred.

Seeing their disappointment, however, he promised to ensure that the Master Plan was accepted and implemented. After months, the team realised that bits and pieces of the Master Plan had been lifted and were arriving as schemes via Ooty. The hijacked Master Plan had many hand-outs and doles to the tribals but the administrative power continued with the bureaucracy whereas the essence of our Master Plan was to give the power of decision making and implementation to the tribals themselves for all the schemes.

A great disillusionment set in. Everyone realised we could never depend on the government to deliver. At this point, it began to dawn on us that many things in our country were falling apart. The New Economic Policy of the Government of India was beginning to have its impact. Food prices had sky rocketed. People were eating less. Children who had been on the road to health were now falling back into the malnutrition graphs of our health team.

We realised that it was becoming more and more difficult to take government responses for granted. They simply would not deliver. We needed to evolve a new strategy to cope with the New Economic Policy. The idea of institutionalising service delivery through community owned institutions surfaced again. The Gudalur Adivasi Hospital had showed us that it could work. The concept could be extended to other areas, like education, as well.

In '95 the idea of converting Vidyodaya, the school started by some ACCORD parents, into a tribal school took shape. We realised that the institutions, the hospital and school were not sustainable. They would go on forever. Yet health and education everywhere in the world are subsidised by governments because it is recognised that if health and education are not priorities the economy of the state would ultimately collapse.

Our earlier strategy of being able to access government resources to support the entire process of change no longer seemed to be viable. The New Economic Policy meant that the government was cutting back on subsidies and the trend was towards privatising the social sector. Further, based on our experience with the Master Plan, people were wary of becoming solely dependent on the government. We had to have our own resources.

We therefore hit on the idea of starting an income generating scheme to sustain the hospital and school. We planned to buy a Tea Estate which would be community owned and controlled. (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2000a)

Baviskar (1995: 233) echoes what I observed for the Gudalur activists – that "[t]he activists of the Sangath are important as mediators who provide resources that adivasis did not have before, and as agents engaged in the task of changing people's consciousness, creating the conditions for self-reliant resistance" and that they "have established a clout that discourages local officials from corruption". At the time of my fieldwork in 2009/10 the activists were, for instance, able to exercise influence on governmental policy-making, via

Stan and Mari's involvement in the formulation of India's 12th national Five Year Development Plan on Scheduled Tribes. For this, they successfully lobbied the replacement of the term "primitive" tribes with "vulnerable".

It is resistance then, in ideology as well as practice, that is central to AMS/ACCORD's self-reliance strategy.

Resistance

> *"Instead the primary issue is the fight against being dispossessed of land, social rights, or existing social ties, often framed as constituting a community's 'culture' or 'identity'."*
> Luisa Steur (2011a: 66)

Fieldwork diary, 13/07/2009, Mumbai, beginning of fieldwork

An issue that keeps cropping up in conversations (mainly because I have in the last couple of days been talking to people working in the education of the disadvantaged and marginalised) is the rift between the educated and uneducated, the latter perceived to be "living in darkness" and in need of being "led to enlightenment". In a conversation with someone who runs an organisation operating three ashrams for street children in the Navi Mumbai/Koperkhairane areas, this issue came up with reference to Adivasis, and their perceived "innocence", which renders them vulnerable to being cheated and exploited by cunning "outsiders" (settlers, landlords, moneylenders, etc.) by means of false promises or addicting them to alcohol and other trappings of "civilisation", to name only two examples, and their ignorance in the ways of the "outside" world. Once they are educated though, this would enable them to fight back. Or turn their back on Adivasi culture, I should add, an understandably not-so-often-mentioned fact in conversations with Adivasis and activists in particular.

It will be interesting and my task to try and find out what Adivasis themselves think of the benefits and possible side-effects of education (which will require a more precise definition and delimination) in the coming months. Most intriguing in this conversation, however, was a side-remark made by my friend, i.e. *that Adivasis have their own way of cunning*. I wonder whether this hints at the kind of Adivasi infrapolitics/hidden transcripts in relation to land issues mentioned in some of the academic literature on Adivasis (e.g. Demmer 2008). I shall try and find out.

During this conversation a lot of "othering", and the use of dualistic categorisations along the lines of external-internal, outsider-insider, Adivasi culture-outsider/Hindu/dominant/mainstream culture kept cropping up, but, interestingly, also the entrenched notions that 1) Adivasis are in reality Hindus because they also worship Hindu gods in addition to their own deities (ignoring the fact that many Hindu gods and goddesses have their origins in indigenous Adivasi gods and goddesses) and 2) that Adivasi culture is doomed to vanish (in, say, a hundred years' time) because it will become assimilated into the dominant society by labour migration and the pull into urban centres such as Mumbai, and in the end, only the name will remain, and Adivasis will eventually be indistinguishable from the surrounding society.

At this point I interjected that a) one cannot generalise these statements to all Adivasi societies because they are made up of so many diverse ethnic groups and identities, and b) that ever since Adivasis came in contact with outside society the dialectic between those who sought to preserve their "unique" culture, on the pattern of Native American reservations, and those who sought to eradicate any perceived and real differences to the surrounding society (or their "otherness"), has existed. The notion of "outsiders" can in turn be seen to have taken

on an almost mythical quality. The insider/outsider dichotomy is certainly not applicable everywhere because a certain amount of contact and interaction is sure to have taken place. The myth of total isolation serves more to reinforce efforts on the part of Adivasis and those sympathising with them alike to demarcate them from other parts of the population perceived to have a negative influence on Adivasi society, whether through Aryan conquest, British timber exploitation or the Indian government's futile attempts at "developing" them.

Ghosh (2006: 509) conceptualises resistance as projects of non-cooperation. Padel (2000: 289) confirms that, historically, for tribal peoples, "[r]emoteness tends to be the best insurance against poverty". Mosse (2011: 155) demonstrates for Bhil Western India that "resistance might be the only appropriate response, illustrated in activist involvement in various social movements".

Demmer (2008) very eloquently depicts the Jenu Kurumba infrapolitics in the Nilgiris. He broadly divides them into two forms, the active use of government institutions, and coexistence. He then identifies the following strategies in particular: labour-boycott, food theft, sabotage, cunning, displays of ignorance, gossip, slander, renting out faulty/climatically inappropriate government housing rather than living in it themselves, resisting corporal punishment in government schools, leasing out farm lands – given to them by the government to settle them – to other people rather than farming it themselves, remaining in the forest to stay outside of the control of cooperative societies' managers, withdrawal into the forest at the arrival of medical teams, pretending not to understand Tamil (this he terms "eloquent silence"), putting their climbing skills and knowledge of animal behaviour to use in raiding state-run chicken farms (this feeds into the image of Adivasis as originally self-reliant people with their ability to remain autonomous and take care of and feed themselves despite state and outsider oppression), sabotage (abandoning of forest officers by Jenu Kurumba trackers in the middle of the forest/leaving them to the mercy of the jungle), cunning/disguise (taking money from several campaigning parties simultaneously during election times, then pretending not to know how to vote), and the propagation of stories about the "dangers" of the forest (see also the stories Tarsh Thekaekara (2008-09) recorded in his blog "In the Shade of a Forest Tree"). These resistance strategies serve to "preserve and enlarge the 'symbolic capital' of the Adivasi" (Demmer 2008: 269-70), by underscoring Adivasis' own forest competence, and ridiculing the cowardice and incompetence of forest officers, thereby helping to keep non-tribal people away from the forest, and thus from Adivasis' prime source of livelihood, forest products.

Such everyday resistance practices form part of a wider set of subaltern survival strategies.

Subalternity, postcolonialism, post-development, and decoloniality

Fieldwork diary, 13/09/2009, Trichy

Vincent took me to an Irular colony, Mailambadi, near his house. There the government had given them land to live on, but effectively, from the promise made two years ago by the State Minister that every SC and ST family would be given two acres of land, only two families effectively received land, and that was far away and practically barren. The Irular there make a living by working as coolies or daily wage labourers, cutting firewood for other people, which is then sold to places in Trichy like hotels, etc., or they hunt small animals such as rats. They even offered me some of their rat curry supper, which I had to decline (I know it is only one of the tricks that your mind plays on you – if I had not known it was rat – my stomach would have probably though – and if I had been non-vegetarian, I would have probably had no objections).
As far as I could ascertain, the kids all go to school, but maximum to 10th standard, after which they usually drop out. There was one 15-year old girl who spoke English really well and she kept asking me questions in English. At the family's house we first went to, who had a buffalo, the mother kept emphasising that if her daughter studies hard, she can come to my country. She told me how difficult it was for her to bring up her five children, three daughters and two sons – *rumba kashtam*. The girl who wanted to come to my country showed me her school books – one of them was on English pronunciation. They were clearly remnants of colonial curricula. The example she read to me went something along the lines of, "Eliza has a Cockney accent. Harry thinks she does not speak nicely." I explained to the girl what a Cockney accent was, but I do not think she was able to relate it to her world, let alone the rest of the passage she was supposed to practice pronunciation with. A lot needs to be done in terms of education.
They then brought out a bedstead for us to sit on, which again made me feel quite embarrassed, and we discussed some of the other problems they face, such as roads and paths in the village becoming impassable during the rains, child marriage, and vocational training for the youngsters. While I made the kids and teenagers (I was mainly surrounded by a gaggle of girls) write down their names in Tamil and I did a transliteration, Vincent started talking to one 15-year old girl, who had dropped out of school, about her future plans. He asked her to read a passage from a leaflet that was lying around, which she haltingly did. They then discussed her options and settled on tailoring as a feasible one (and she seemed to agree with it too) because tailors are high in demand (for cholis, uniforms, etc. – Vincent said he was not able to find anyone to tailor his children's uniforms). A three-month training course costs 1000 Rupees, which I paid for, although I had serious qualms about spreading the image of someone coming from the Global North handing out cash to anyone in need, without really changing the unjust system (the Mother Theresa approach, as Stan called it).

Can the subaltern speak (Spivak 1988)? That is, when the subaltern speaks, is there enough infrastructure for people to recognise it as resistant speech (Lahiri and Spivak 2014)? Can only those with experience of being subaltern speak about themselves and their experience? If

yes, why, and if no, who else can, why and how? Does this equip subalterns to speak only about themselves or about other subalterns too?

The rejection of political paternalism, followed by the assertion of Dalit and Adivasi identity (Steur 2011a: 72), played an important role in recent Adivasi assertion in Wayanad/Kerala, for instance. The dominant mode of thinking that AMS/ACCORD in fact want to break with, is the automatic assumption that the active agent of change does not belong to a subaltern group. What NGO leaders such as Stan do best, is to instil people with the belief that they can do it themselves. Ironically, in AMS/ACCORD this has led to the excessive foregrounding of Adivasi and the obliviation of non-Adivasi (the activists') agency, such as expressed in the Lao Tzu quote found on the side of a building of one of JC's member organisations in Odisha:

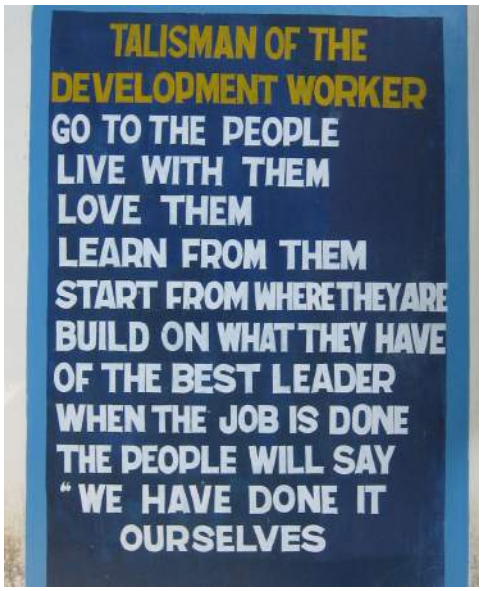

Illustration 7 Talisman of the development worker. Source: AMS/ACCORD

I discuss the problems this narrative strategy engenders in the subchapters "The narrative of Adivasi glorification" in the chapter "Stories of Adivasi indigeneities" and "The narrative of tribal ownership" in the analytic chapter "Stories of chai for change".

Personally, as regards my writing about subaltern Adivasis, by virtue of my origin and education, I have to be aware that I am not always able to write from a non-Eurocentric point of view, let alone a subaltern one, even though my conceptual and methodological anthropological tools allow me to do so in most instances. Inevitably therefore, even though I try to guard against it, I have to be cognisant of the fact that my research, as a form of writing *about* the subaltern, may (unintentionally) constitute a form of othering, and thus an exercise

of power. Also, Tilche (2011: 38) alerts us to the fact that we have to be critical of "letting" the subaltern speak because it can be a "patronising way of treating others less humanly than ourselves". Not to try and "give" the subaltern voice, but to clear the space for her to speak, as far as I, as the main storyteller, am in a position to do so, is what I try to do throughout this thesis.

Mignolo (2000: 183−186; 213−214) distinguishes between subalternity as a postmodern critique (a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism) and subalternity as a decolonial critique (a critique of Eurocentrism from subalternised and silenced knowledges) (Grosfoguel 2008). Applied to this research, I therefore question whether 1) engaging Adivasis' own epistemology equals epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2009), and 2) whether AMS/ACCORD represent a decolonialising, epistemically disobedient project. It is with these two questions in mind that I first of all clear the space for a retelling of AMS/ACCORD's most important economic survival strategies, land reclamation, day-to-day forest conflict negotiation, and everyday forms of resistance. For this I draw on stories presented by AMS/ACCORD and ActionAid on the Chembakolli blog that are told as if they were narrated by tribal activist individuals, Gangadharan, Subramanian (KTS), and Bomman. In answer to the two questions above, I return to a critical reading of these stories in "Stories of chai for change?".

Land reclamation

Hi! I am Gangadharan.

I am from the Mullukurumba tribe. My wife is Saraswathi and she is a nurse at the Adivasi hospital in Gudalur. I have two sons Prakash and Prasad.

My village is called Nedungode and it is in the Erumad area. K.C.Krishnan, who worked as an animator in our area, would come to our village and conduct meetings. He told me about the AMS. In many villages, sangams (village groups) were formed. These sangams helped us to become united to raise our voice against the injustice and to get our land back.

This photo below shows our people protesting about the attack on Adivasis by fasting in front of a government office.

Illustration 8 Fast in front of a government office. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

The sangam work began in 1987. In each Adivasi village, meetings were held to discuss the problems. Plays were performed to make people understand the issues. And, to give us confidence and strength. The animators and leaders were trained to stage such plays. Here is a photo of one such group rehearsing a play. The man in pink shirt is Radhakrishnan of Devala.

Illustration 9 Conscientisation through theatre plays. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

Then, it was decided to hold a public demonstration. On December 5th 1988, 10,000 Adivasi people came to Gudalur. We told the people and the government about the injustice towards the Adivasis and how we were being exploited. We organised this demonstration for all of us. This day is celebrated by us as Adivasi Day.

From that day, the AMS worked for the progress of the Adivasi community.

Justice. Collectively we work to protect Adivasis from getting cheated and to safeguard the rights of the Adivasi people.

The AMS has brought Adivasis together to raise their voices against exploitation and legally tackle the times when we have problems.

The AMS is also working towards improving the health, education and economic status of the Adivasi people.

I participated in the 1988 demonstration. It was a great experience. It was as if we were suddenly free to express our problems to the outside world. It gave us lot of strength and also courage to claim back and work on our land. We were able to tell the landless Adivasis to

assert their rights on our land and start cultivation. Here is a photo of one such attempt in a village.

Illustration 10 Starting cultivation. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

Come December 5th this year, it will be 20 years since we publicly showed our strength and demanded justice for the first time. Today, we have come a long way. But, there are other problems and new challenges for Adivasis. We are taking steps to address these issues. This is the best way to celebrate the 20th anniversary.

We will write to you more about it in the next few blogs. Bye! Gangadharan (AMS/ACCORD and ActionAid 2012)

It is this 1988 land rights demonstration – the story at the beginning of this thesis – that has taken on the significance of AMS/ACCORD's creation myth. Two points in connection with land reclamation by AMS/ACCORD are worth flagging up. The issue of what kind of land Adivasis are claiming through organisations such as AMS/ACCORD is a thorny one, since NGOs such as AMS/ACCORD do not fully disclose their reclamation tactics for obvious reasons. The only thing that can be said is that, in general, movements such as AMS/ACCORD diverge from the path of restoration of imagined pasts by abandoning claims to "original" lands. Instead they assert the right to claim any land as rightfully theirs as redress for historical injustice.

Secondly, social movements have seen a shift from direct conflicts with owners of property, to struggles against being deprived of land by more amorphous means. Stan's oft-repeated story of not being able to grab the tea plantation owner by the collar any more, as they used to be able to, as a representative of the formerly identifiable powers expropriating Adivasis, is an example for this shift from tangible local culprits to present-day, more intractable malevolent forces.

Day-to-day forest conflict negotiation

The story of Theyyakunni village

Theyyakunni village is in the Erumad area. Adivasis belonging to the Mullukurumba tribe live in this village. For many many years, our people were living in this village and were growing paddy, vegetables, grains like ragi in the land surrounding the village.

Illustration 11 Mullukurumba women working in paddy fields of Kappala. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

But, Adivasis had ownership documents called Patta only for the paddy fields, which were issued by the British Government before 1947. For the other land, they did not have any Patta. In the 1970s and 1980s, many government officials created problems for the Adivasis living in Theyyakunni village and restricted them from using land without Patta. They told us that we could not cultivate the land.

Then came the year 1987. It was the time when village sangams were formed in many villages by the AMS. There was a meeting in our village also. Everyone in the village decided to fight for their rights over land and a 27-member committee was formed in the village. Young leaders like Achuthan and Raman led the people in Theyyakunni village in asserting their land rights. They held many meetings, went on processions to government offices in big groups and insisted that this is our land. This was one such procession in the Erumadu area, near Theyyakunni village.

Illustration 12 Land rights procession. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

Government officials from forest department and revenue department tried to prevent us from cultivating our land and threatened us by filing many police cases against the Adivasis. But, the people stood united and they fought against the government.

Then, in 1990, a good officer was posted as the District Collector in Ooty. Many Adivasi leaders went to meet him and told him about the problems faced by our people regarding land. They asked him to address this issue immediately. Adivasis organised many public meetings to explain their struggle and they invited the District Collector and other officials for these meetings. The person in dark glasses was the District Collector.

Illustration 13 Meeting with the District Collector. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

The AMS asked him to personally enquire about our problem. He agreed and visited many Adivasi villages. He came to Theyyakunni village also and talked to the people there. He enquired with the government officers about the legal position of our land. He was convinced that Adivasis had been living there and cultivating the land for generations.

Then, he ordered to the officers that the Adivasis should not be disturbed and they should be allowed to live and cultivate in their land. It was a big victory for the struggle of the village sangam. Adivasi families of Theyyakunni then decided to cultivate tea in their land, since it is a permanent crop and gives regular income.

ACCORD and AMS helped the Adivasi families to grow tea by giving them tea plants free of cost. Today, Theyyakunni village has many nice tea gardens and many families are getting

income by selling their tea leaves. They have even formed a cooperative called Adivasi Tea Leaf Marketing Society to sell their leaves collectively.

Illustration 14 Adivasi Tea Leaf Marketing Society. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

There are some more villages like Theyyakunni where people have successfully got their land back and are growing tea and many other crops. This is an Adivasi farmer in Theyyakunni village bringing his tea leaves to sell.

Illustration 15 Bringing tea leaf to sell. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

Bye, Subramanian (AMS/ACCORD and ActionAid 2012)

Everyday forms of resistance

Hello, I am Bomman. I am the current secretary of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS). I belong to the Bettakurumba tribe and we live in Kanjikolli village right now.

Illustration 16 Bomman, current secretary of the AMS. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

By now, you will have realised that December 5th 1988 was a very important day for the Adivasis of Gudalur. After that big protest demonstration in which thousands of Adivasis participated, Adivasi families believed in their strength. Village after village, people held meetings and decided to regain the land that was owned by our ancestors. Once people got land, the sangam encouraged the Adivasis to grow tea and coffee. People cleared small plots of land around their hamlets and started cultivating different crops. There was excitement all over this place as you can see from this old (a bit damaged) photograph!

Illustration 17 Land rights demonstration. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

It is good to know that all of you are studying and learning about Chembakolli village. So, I would like to tell you a little bit more about the history of the Chembakolli village.

Chembakolli village lies in the border of the Mudhumalai Wildlife Sancturary. Many Adivasi families belonging to the Kattunayakan and Bettakurumba tribes have been living in this village for many years. But, they did not have any proper legal documents to show ownership of this land. They were often harassed by government officials.

When the AMS launched the land rights campaign, Adivasis from other villages also supported the struggle of Chembakolli. Twenty Bettakurumba families from Theppakadu village came to live in Chembakolli village. They built small huts to live in and cleared land around their houses to cultivate. Next year, some more families came there and they also planted banana, tea, coffee, pepper and other crops.

Illustration 18 Crops. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

The forest department was not happy about Adivasis living close to the wildlife sanctuary and they asked our people to leave the village. They tried to threaten us and later sent a legal notice. Because the Adivasis had the sangam, everyone came together to discuss the problems and give support to each other. It was decided that they will not be scared and will stand together.

This happened many times. In 1998, once the forest officials came to our village and even destroyed the crops grown by some families. The forest department tried to plant some trees in our fields. But, the Adivasis living there for many years did not want to leave Chembakolli. We met the higher officers and explain the situation. We even contacted officers in central government in Delhi. Those days, the AMS organised many meetings in Gudalur town and explained the struggle of Adivasis to the general public.

Illustration 19 Public meeting. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

In spite of many attempts by different people, we stayed put in the village and we are in possession of our land even today. The problems continue, but we are also determined to stay here. Now, there are 120 families living in Chembakolli. They are from the Bettakurumba and Kattunayakan tribes.

All the people in this village have land on which they grow tea, coffee, pepper, banana and vegetables. All the children from Chembakolli go to school. Most of them study at the Vidyodaya School in Gudalur.

Now with a new law called the Forest Rights Act, our people here will get more rights over forests and facilities. We are working towards achieving all this.

Illustration 20 Kottaimedu land rights demonstration. Photo: AMS/ACCORD

Today, Chembakolli is a beautiful village very close to the forest with a strong sangam.

Bomman (AMS/ACCORD and ActionAid 2012)

These stories of everyday conflict and resistance surrounding land form the basis of AMS/ACCORD's self-reliance agenda, the evolution of which I now chart.

New/alternative economic thinking towards a more sustainable economic system

Fieldwork diary, 15/09/2010, Durham

The most exciting thing for me at the moment is shuttling back and forth between theory on new economic thinking and economic self-reliance in practice, as exemplified by AMS/ACCORD and JC; between the general global problem (i.e. the big economic issues here that will affect the way we live in a post-peak oil world affected by climate change) and specific local solutions. Since returning from the field I have been trying to read as much as possible of the literature that was circulating in Gudalur, in order to try and understand their approach, strategies and perspectives on certain key issues such as indigeneity, trade, Development, aid, etc. I have also been trying to source as much as possible on the theory of self-reliance, but have yet to come across a systematic theory other than Gandhi's gram swaraj or Galtung's Marxist "third way" of self-reliance (which he predicted would arise from the Majority World after the demise of the old international economic order and the decline of the new economic order). I suspect to find many of my questions answered in the work of the New Economics Foundation and FEASTA (Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability), especially because AMS/ACCORD have collaborated with these think tanks in the past.

During my stay with JC India the current economic "crisis", and possible "alternative" responses to it, were an ever-present theme.[11] Three key environmentalist texts that were circulating in Gudalur and which the activists cited as sources of inspiration were John Seymour's classic "The Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency" (Seymour and Sutherland 2002), Barbara Kingsolver's "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle" (Kingsolver, Hopp et al. 2007), and Rajni Bakshi's "Bazaars, Conversations, and Freedom: For a Market Culture Beyond Greed and Fear" (Bakshi 2009). As a result, I started looking at responses to economic insecurity in the West, from locavore to grow-your-own-food movements. This led me to take a second look at the theories for creating more economic robustness that Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2001, 2007) expounds in his "Fooled by Randomness" and "The Black Swan". This linked up with responses to climate change and the creation of more self-reliant, sustainable, and resilient ways of life, again leading back to indigenous lifeways being perceived and promoted by environmentalist activists as one of those sustainable lifestyles that could help tackle the problems faced by humanity in the 21st century. Out of this crystalised my interest in the particular type of self-reliance strategy AMS/ACCORD have developed that is, simultaneously, influenced by and generates new narratives of Adivasi indigeneity.

In this thesis I therefore conceptualise and analyse self-reliance as an aspect of the type of indigeneity the activists I researched construct and attribute to the tribal peoples they work with. For this purpose, self-reliance is subsumed under indigeneity; accordingly I am interested in the kind of self-reliance theory that has its origins in a particular idea of indigeneity.

Self-reliance – towards a more people-centred and people-led tribal development paradigm

> *"In a 21st century of expensive water, food, housing, education, healthcare and power, self-sufficiency has its attraction."*
> Stephen Corry (2011)

Galtung (1976a, b, 1978a, b, N.D.-a, b) insists that self-reliance does not mean complete self-sufficiency and autarchy in terms of basic needs, complete independence in terms of government, or sovereignty in terms of territory, even though so-called indigenous peoples

[11] Other key ideas and concepts that were circulating and hotly debated in Gudalur during my time there, which, however, I do not have room to deal with in detail in this thesis, or I do in the two following chapters, were community, localisation, decentralisation, resilience, Transition Initiatives, sustainability, permanence, permaculture, conscious selectivity, intermediate technology (E.F. Schumacher), Gandhi's sarvodaya and gram swaraj and accompanying Gandian ethos (esp. of NGO workers), social entrepreneurship as a tool for social justice (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara N.D.), and the transformation of the activists from the 1970s to the present from troublemakers to social entrepreneurs (Marcel Thekaekara and Thekaekara 2007).

may have originally enjoyed all these prior to the advent of colonialism, and many indigenous groups today are calling for the restoration of these entitlements as the only way to survive and thrive as distinct and healthy indigenous cultures. Self-reliance, in Galtung's conceptualisation, means exactly the opposite, i.e. inter-dependence between self-reliant communities, without dominance of one over the other (as is the case with the centre-periphery structure we find in the capitalist market economy), and each community, group, or village republic (if one is a Gandhian) exercising a certain degree of self-determination, and hence enjoying a certain degree of interdependent autonomy.

The achievement of self-reliance also depends on whether one is able to be context-generating oneself, rather than being dependent on a context produced by others. It is this ability of AMS/ACCORD to be context-generating themselves, inter alia, through their narrative efforts, I argue, that has helped them develop a new economic system they claim is based on tribal values.

In Gudalur, AMS/ACCORD's economic self-reliance strategy centres chiefly around the production of tea. Thematically (as well as literally), this research has thus been fuelled by tea and the stories attached to it. Mari and Stan tell the story of how the Gudalur Adivasis came to acquire a tea plantation:

We needed to evolve a new strategy to cope with the New Economic Policy. In every village people started discussing the future – where do we go from here? These discussions culminated in a huge meeting where over 150 adivasis along with all the non-tribal staff gathered together to talk about the future. It was a five day retreat and we called it the "Mahasabha".

And at this Mahasabha we radically redefined our strategy for social change. Rather than depend on the government or any external agencies, the adivasis decided to embark on a strategy of self-reliance. They would have their own institutions – owned and managed by them to cater to the needs of their people. The Gudalur Adivasi Hospital had showed us that it could work.

Everyone was unanimous. ACCORD had to pull out. Self-reliance was a must. "We have to stand on our own feet" became the catch phrase. Slowly, the idea of converting Vidyodaya, the school started by some ACCORD parents, into a tribal school took shape. Similarly, forming a society to meet housing needs also emerged. In Erumadu, a small group got together and formed a housing collective. Using a small grant from ACCORD, they have loaned money to a few families to build or repair their own houses. This is forming the basis for developing yet another community institution - a housing collective. And we could start a marketing society to cater to the economic needs of the community. Maybe even a bank!! But….

Institutions were costly propositions! And it was obvious that the people would not be able to afford to pay the entire costs of services like health and education in the foreseeable future. Even in more prosperous economies these services were subsidised in one form or another. So where would the money come from? The Mahasabha threw up the answer: A Tea

Plantation, which would be owned by the entire community and would be the source of collective wealth!! Buying a tea plantation estate needed a great deal of money. And the possibility seemed remote. However after a great deal of negotiating […] three years later in June 1998 we bought the Madhuvana Tea Plantation with a 2 crore loan from The Charities Advisory Trust, U.K.

With the purchase of the 176 acre Madhuvana Plantation in 1998 – the adivasis were suddenly hopeful of making their dream of self reliance a reality! Close on the heels of buying the plantation we also launched the Adivasi Tea Leaf Marketing Cooperative – through which the tea leaves of the adivasis are marketed. (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2002)

The director of the tea platation is K.T Subramanian, a Mullakurumba. He was one of the original founders of ACCORD and, like Chathi, an animator of the first hour. In the Chembakolli pack his views on self-reliance are presented thus:

KTS talks about the tea trade (2008)

I was at the Adivasi land-rights demonstration in '88 when 10,000 Adivasis came together in Gudalur. I was at the front of the demonstration. After this, more animators wanted to join us and every village created a sangam (village committee). Then, after some time new leaders came from the sangams and the AMS grew.

In '95 we had a big, five-day Adivasi conference (Mahasabha) about our lives and how to be. And why are we in this situation? How can our children get a good education? How can we stand on our own legs without depending on other people, landlords, rich men and others like that? And how can we be self-sustaining?

We discussed how each village has common resources like fruit trees, rivers, honey, roots. Anyone can collect it. We do not have ownership. Outsiders put up fences and say, "This is my land. Keep away. This is only my property. This is my house." Whereas, Adivasis do not have a lock on the door. We share. The land and the forest belong to everyone.

My role at ACCORD at that time was a programme coordinator. We negotiated from '95 to '98 with a bank for buying the estate (Madhuvana, 176 acres). When we finally purchased it in June 1998, I took management of this. It was a common resource. We thought the money would subsidise other activities like health expenses and education. But the reality is that the tea price has crashed and our income has come down. Traders also tried to cheat us by under weighing our crop. So, we set up the ATLM (Adivasi Tea Leaf Marketing) to get better prices.

Then, through our land-rights campaign we taught the people to stand up for their rights. We did the same with the tea. Tea can give proof of possession of the land for the government because it is a permanent crop. We had a tea planting programme in the villages too. More than 2,000 families planted at least half an acre each.

Definitely this has helped people's standard of living improve. They get an everyday income, all year round. They are proud of it. "I have tea and I am selling tea." I went to the villages to tell them about tea. I showed them how to plant it. They said, "How can we cultivate this? This is only for rich people."

They are now treated equally to non-tribal people. Before, their level was very low. But now they have land. They are farmers and others are treating them equally.

Now, in Madhuvana estate, we're stopping planting more tea and we are developing more coffee and pepper. We want to introduce medicinal plants which will get more income and the hospital will use ayurvedic (traditional) medicines.

Now, we have a shortage of labourers. We need them at 8am and they come from so far. So, we're building 12 houses on the estate. Four are already completed. In June this year, all 12 will be completed. We want to bring different tribals here, not just Paniyas.

This is very different to 20 years ago. The tribals never came together. Now, they have unity. Since the AMS started and the Adivasi Cultural Festival once a year, everyone has unity. People dance on the same stage and everyone can interact and understand the different cultures. We light lamps for all of the Adivasis. Before, the tribes had separate lamps.

Now there is only one.

Just Change, our community trading project is a very, very new concept for us. We started it three to four years ago. We linked the producer directly to the consumer. We were buying rice and oils from outside and other poor people were being cheated like us. Now, we trade with a Kerala group, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. And also with the UK and Germany. So, this is a global change – country to country. Not village to village like 20 years ago.

Before, I grew up on sambar (a type of vegetable stew) and rice and roots like sweet potatoes. Now, our food system has changed. I have been to Germany and UK. Now I like sausages and new varieties of vegetables – green veg, lettuce, salads, pizzas and pastas.

Twenty years ago my house had no electricity. I studied with a kerosene lamp. Now we have electricity and an attached bathroom, fridge, TV, radio and computer. So, we have more news and information from the world.

My children are living the same as the non-tribals. When I was young I went with my father to the forest. I knew the name of wood and trees and animals. I have not taught my children this. At three, they went to school. They are living like the rest of the public people. This will take place. We cannot stop it.

Now I move around on a motorbike. Before I got buses and walked most places.

My father's forest was very different. Then, it was thick forest. He gathered roots and fruits that have all been lost now. When I was young, I went to school. So, things are always changing. (ActionAid and ACCORD 2009)

*

After the socio-economic parameters in Gudalur in Part II, I now take a closer look, in Part III, at the theory and practice, and the narratives behind Just Change, the new economic model designed to bring about Gudalur Adivasi self-reliance.

Part III

Just Change - a story about a community trading network

A favourite story of the activists to introduce the work of Just Change is the following parable:

The parable of the labourers

In all our years of work with the Adivasis, in different parts of India, we find that their economy operates on very different principles from those of the dominant capitalist economy. In 1997, an Adivasi group was invited to Germany to be a part of the Protestant Kirchentag, a Church celebration which takes place every alternate year. At one service, there was a

gospel reading, the parable of the labourers who worked different hours but were all paid the same wage. As kids we had debated the justice behind it.

The Adivasis however, had no problem with this biblical concept at all. They could not figure out what there was to debate. They told us how at the end of the hunt, a share of meat was sent to every family in the village, regardless of whether they had participated in the hunt or not, even adding a portion for guests who were visiting at the time. There was no question of calculating any individual's labour or input! But this was not all. Even stray passersby were given a share to take home, and apparently knowing this, many opportunistic non Adivasi neighbours would ensure that they 'happened' to pass by when the spoils were being divided. The Adivasis just laughed. They bore no ill will towards the uninvited guests. Yet when the reading was explained to them and they were asked to comment on 'sharing' in their community they were nonplussed. The stories had to be coaxed out, gradually elicited from them. Later a puzzled Adivasi remarked, "I do not know why they feel the need to talk about these things so much. At home we never talk about things like sharing or values. It is a part of life, you just do what you have to do."

This made us pause. Made us wonder whether these economic concepts which are inherent in Adivasi culture could be brought to bear on other communities as well. At first it appears that it is impossible - the rest of the world has gone too far down the road of individual effort and individual reward to now think of collective or cooperative ways of working. Look at the Soviet Union and the collapse of the socialist economy, we were told.

However, our exposure to marginalised and excluded communities and concerned individuals both here in India and abroad brought home really forcibly the fact that there exists throughout the globe, a community of people who believe and support with all their hearts and minds, the concept of a world in which there is justice, solidarity, equity, and peace. This group would surely welcome the concept of a collective which was non exploitative and which actually worked! (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2000b)

Fundamentally then, Just Change is a story about justice. The movement is motivated by a sense of injustice and the desire to generate a challenge to both unfair trade structures and Fair Trade structures that are not perceived to be fair enough yet by the activists.

A story about trade injustice – a challenge to Fair Trade

Fieldwork diary, 21/5/2011, JCUK national meeting, Friends Meeting House, Oxford

For myself it is in a way very gratifying to be working on fair trade issues again, via a detour of land rights, international human rights law, indigenous peoples, and the concept of self-reliance, because my very first undergraduate research project was on Fair Trade. At the time, my colleagues and I were interested in how the fair trade concept was being put into action through the chain of world shops in Austria, and what motivated people to volunteer in these world shops. I remember spending a lot of time interviewing stall owners and customers in sub-zero temperatures at Vienna's Spittelberg Christmas market. I consider myself very lucky to be able to take up my initial research interest again, and get to spend time with the producers this time, at the other end of the FT spectrum (and in warmer climes)! You end up where you started, or as T.S. Eliot puts it, "and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time"!

Since then a lot has changed and the interesting fact is that fair trade has become a household name, fair trade products have become more affordable and have diversified, and, dare I say it, fair trade has been able to tackle some of the injustices of the conventional trading system,

and make a difference to the lives of many producers. FT, however, is really only the start of the journey, and initiatives such as Just Change help question both the conventional trade system and highlight the shortcomings of the current FT model. Crucially though, movements such as Just Change and Transition offer us the opportunity to move beyond criticism, to putting our words into action to develop new and different economic systems. They prod us to analyse the interconnectedness and the systemic nature of the problems facing trade, the environment, etc., and to move beyond established economic thinking towards creating an economics as if people mattered, as fleshed out by E.F. Schumacher in his seminal "Small is Beautiful". To what extent such "alternative" economic thinking can emerge from its marginalised niche position in a world of rampant vulture and disaster capitalist expansion in the form of deregulation of markets, market liberalisation, structural reforms/adjustments, and large-scale resource extraction and exploitation by multi-national corporations (Thekaekara 2009b) and become the remit not just of starry-eyed idealist economic thinkers, is another question altogether of course.

From "alternative trade" to "fair trade" – a brief history

1946	Ten Thousand Villages (associated with the Mennonite Central Committee) in the U.S.: craft imported from Puerto Rico. Very few people realise that FT has its roots in the U.S.
1949	SERRV (Sales Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation and Vocation): cuckoo clocks from Germany to the U.S.
1960s	Solidarity trade: Alternative Trading Organisations (ATOs) and World Shops (first in 1969 in the Netherlands); Oxfam launches "Helping by Selling"; during the 1960s alternative trade became a movement. Two German students start importing coffee from Colombia (very few trade regulations at the time). This led to what was then called Third World Shops in continental Europe. The focus then moved from coffee to craft, which dominated the FT market in the 1960s.
1968	UNCTAD adopts the slogan "Trade not Aid" at Delhi conference
1977	International Workshop of Third World Producers and Alternative Marketing Organizations (AMO) in Vienna
1980s	Demand for handicrafts plateaus; rise of agricultural products (starting with coffee) as a reaction to financial crisis and detrimental impact of falling commodity prices on Majority World producers
1989	Inaugural IFAT (International Fair Trade Association, now World Fair Trade Organization) meeting in the Netherlands. This was the turning point of FT. Until then there had been no FT label and it was at this meeting that the idea of a FT label was mooted for the first time. In the UK Oxfam had a few shops but FT had not yet taken off. FT was big in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany where GEPA was the single-largest FT organisation. First fair trade (FT) label: Max Havelaar
1997	Major FT labels merge into Fair Trade Labelling Organisations (FLO).

Late 1990s	Supermarkets start stocking FT products.
2002	FLO launches the International Fair Trade Certification Mark.
2009	Growth of FT doubled between 2002 and 2009.

Illustration 21 Milestones in the history of fair trade. Sources: Wills (2000), Thekaekara (2009b)

JC – seeking to go beyond fair trade: taking ethical or "fair" trading one step further

To illustrate the core principle behind JC, (supposedly) Adivasis' particular understanding of fairness, the activists most often avail themselves of the following story:

Bomman's German friend

The invitation to Germany of an Adivasi group in 1997 further strengthened this belief but raised some new questions about the concept of fair trade. Bomman, one of the Adivasi leaders, was thoroughly upset to hear that his new found German friends paid 3 times more for our tea than it cost in Gudalur. "That's ridiculous and unfair", he protested. "How can our friends who work to support our struggle for self-reliance pay more for our tea? They should pay less, not more". Bomman's perspective led us to look at new ways of working which would incorporate his concept of what was fair. (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2000b)

The main points of criticism JC levels at fair trade are that FT does not change existing unjust trading structures and fails to bridge the producer-consumer divide. FT, as we know it today, principally talks about producers, as in the most commonly accepted definition of FINE, the informal association of the four main fair trading networks (**F**airtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), **I**nternational Fair Trade Association, now the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), **N**etwork of European Worldshops (NEWS!), and **E**uropean Fair Trade Association (EFTA)):

> Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers - especially in the South. Fair Trade organisations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising, and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade. (FLO, IFAT (WFTO) et al. 2001)

JC, in contrast, posits that fair trade is equally about consumers. Does FT then only pay lip service to the consumer-producer partnership? Is it in fact a burden for the poor consumer? JC argues that, in reality, both marginalised producers AND consumers are excluded from accessing fair trade structures and products, and FT has not yet been able to escape its elitist/exclusive image. FT still operates in a premium niche market. Further shortcomings of

FT are that it is still vulnerable to market forces, in that its development as a brand with its own label reinforces existing free market mechanisms, rather than change unequal power structures. FT branding scandals such as the Nestlé Partner's Blend controversy led to a backlash against the FT label. Though it seeks for a better and fairer distribution of profits, it does not challenge the notion of profit. FT aims more at an attitudinal change in consumer behaviour than structural change of international trade. Moreover, FT, as it currently operates, does not change the fundamental relationship between capital and labour. Capital still has the power to "buy" labour, and the fruits of labour. Paying a higher price reduces the exploitation and alleviates the suffering of the producer, but it does not change the current inequitable trade system. JC also holds that FT should not just be about whether a product qualifies for certification because this may disadvantage non-certified fairly traded products. Lastly, there is a lack of diversification of fairly traded goods and a dearth of South to South fair trading initiatives, such as the Indian Shop for Change (www.shopforchange.in) and Participatory Guarantee Scheme (PGS) (www.pgsorganic.in), in that FT is still very focused on the Northern hemisphere.

In contrast to the mainstream FT model, the Just Change model questions the assumptions underlying current FT arrangements. It seeks to build direct relationships between disadvantaged people across the globe and it challenges the way the international commodity market treats both poor producers and consumers:

> JUST CHANGE attempts to create new trade structures that reflect the principle value that the purpose of economic activity should not be the pure accumulation of wealth but the well-being of society and should therefore be equally concerned about the distribution of wealth as it is about the creation of wealth. JC therefore challenges free market capitalism based on the assumption of conflicting interests and the exploitation thereof through competition. (Just Change India 2003)

Thus, at least in theory, JC attempts to challenge the constraints of conventional trading relationships, by making it possible for poor and disadvantaged consumers to participate in the fair trade movement. By taking control of, and shortening the market chain, JC tries to ensure better prices for producers and delivery of good quality products at lower costs to consumers. Also, JC products do not carry the FT label. "This is because its founders are keen to differentiate its approach from conventional fair trade models that focus on negotiations around price" (ActionAid and AMS/ACCORD 2011h: 20). JC recognises that labour and capital both have roles to play in the economy, but in contrast to mainstream economic thinking, JC seeks to ensure they are not in competition with each other, and instead work in tandem for mutual benefit. In short, JC seeks to change the relation between capital and labour, and between investors, producers, and consumers.

The Just Change concept – theory and principles

The following values activists ascribe to Adivasis form the conceptual foundation for JC:

Adivasi, land and forest

"Chembakolli is a very special village because two tribes, the Bettakurumbas and the Kattunaikens, live and work there alongside each other.

These Adivasis traditionally do not have a sense of ownership. They do not believe the land can be owned. For the Adivasis land is like air. It is not made by man, therefore it cannot be owned by man. For them the land is there to be used. But there are lots of rules about using the land. One strong and strict rule says that they could not cultivate land in consecutive years. The land has to rest and recover. They have songs that compare the land to childbirth – it has to recover and renew.

Similarly, no Adivasi ever kills an animal for sport – only for food. Again, there are strict rules to do with this. They ask for forgiveness from animals. There are many rituals around making peace with the animal.

During the colonial period, the Adivasis lost a lot of their forest. The British needed timber for the railways and shipping industry and so the Adivasis were told that the forest was reserved and that they could no longer live there. Chembakolli happened to be on a path where timber was illegally cut and smuggled out to Kerala. For this reason, for many years the forest department tried to move away the Adivasis who were living there. Then, a few years ago, a government official came and destroyed their tea crops. But the people decided to hold on. Eventually, the National Human Rights Commission got involved and said the villagers could stay.

When the Adivasis began to plant tea, some were concerned that the tea planters who earned the most money would leave the community. Instead they have decided that it is more important to make sure that everyone shares in wealth, so they joined together and formed the Adivasi Tea Leaf Marketing Society (ATLM). Today the profits of ATLM are shared by members of the larger community. This shows you what it means to be an Adivasi. For them it is important that everyone in the community is well – not just individuals.

It is important for communities to link and understand each other and what we have in common. Tea is a starting point. If children grow up understanding that equal trade works and seeing that real links between different communities in the world are possible, an entire generation will see the world in a new way."

Stan Thekaekara. Founder of ACCORD (ActionAid and ACCORD 2009)

Social justice and equity

Many social activists, such as Stan Thekaekara (2004b), trace the beginning of the present downward spiral of poverty and deprivation in India to the country's move away from its socialist origins, and the mixed economy this prescribed, to the 1991 liberalisation and the introduction of the "free" market economy this demanded. As he succinctly summarises,

[t]he loss of jobs for the poor of rich nations is NOT the gain of poorer people in a poorer country. It is dangerous to presume that a movement to poorer countries is a movement to poorer people! (Thekaekara 2004a, emphasis in original)

JC is "rooted in the conviction that traditional approaches to social and economic justice, on their own, are not likely to work in a market-dominated economy" (Just Change India 2010b). JC thus tries to go one step further than benevolence, kindness, and charity, to addressing historical injustice, since differences in power and wealth in the trade chain are often the result of historical events and processes that have come to define the economic status of communities up to the present. "The sharing between participants must be based not on their relative power within the economic chain – which translated means the ability to exploit the situation to better advantage – but on justice" (Just Change 2010).

Co-operation instead of competition

Since JC seeks to link actors across the economic chain – producers, consumers, and investors – into a cooperative way of working, it is clear that the conventional notion of profit is not conducive to the way they want to work. They have therefore developed the notion of "benefit", as an alternative to the notion of profit, as the underlying purpose of their activities. "The guiding principle of the notion of benefit is the fact that all human beings have an equal right to the earth's resources – natural and created" (Just Change India 2010f).

South-north solidarity

JC wants to show that Development can be two-way by building international solidarity between poor communities in the global south and north through direct trading links that connect producers, consumers, and investors across the globe in a non-exploitative relationship and foster personal friendships.

Redefinition of the local

JC seeks to question what we mean by "local" and "global" at the beginning of the 21st century, i.e. whether our present definitions are still adequate, or whether they have become antiquated and redundant. Stan (Thekaekara 2004b) attempts a relocalisation of the "local":

To me, local is not geographical. Local is not a small community, tucked away in some tiny village, struggling to produce all its requirements within a five kilometre radius. I think we live in a far too sophisticated, complex world for that to happen. And so I would redefine what we mean by local. To me local means linking up communities who believe in certain fundamental principles. It means linking up people who subscribe to a similar kind of thinking. To a similar set of values. It does not matter where we live. What matters is whether we are willing to work together for mutual benefit. […] Years of "thinking globally and acting locally" has led us now to think locally and act globally as well!

Mutuality

"Helping the Adivasis is a huge motivator for people in the UK, but Stan is adamant that the relationship must be one of mutual benefit, not charity" (Discussion paper for JCUK national gathering 2012).

Changing gender roles

Fieldwork diary, 09/04/2010, Gudalur

Shikha, who works for JCI, told me that in Calicut trade has, for centuries, been dominated by three families. These families would trade in particular goods, for instance one family would only trade rice. Trade was completely male-dominated. When they (JCI) first went round the trading houses with the three women responsible for JC in Calicut, it was quite revolutionary. It helped that all three were from different religious communities, e.g. the Muslim woman found she could connect best with Muslim traders. Shikha then told me about the paper she had written about women's economic empowerment through JC (Bhattacharji 2008).

Beyond income generation

"The JC concept seeks to go beyond income generation by first ensuring that people's incomes flow back into the local economy as much as possible, and secondly, if it must flow out, to ensure that as much as possible flows to other similar communities rather than into the 'market'" (Just Change India 2010).

Sustainability through community ownership

In the JC model, the challenge is how to build community not as something separate from economic activity, but through the economic activities chosen by (the members of the) community. JC seeks to do this by not allowing the ownership of the product to be surrendered, by facilitating community-owned and community–managed businesses, and building a community-controlled supply chain. In the JC model of ownership, products are 100% owned by the JCI producer company. For instance, when JCUK first started importing tea, soap, and spices produced by the Gudalur Adivasis, JCUK (see below) made a down payment (covering the real costs up to that point and a fair wage up front for the Adivasi tea growers), but rather than being a sale, this was a transfer, with JCI nominally retaining its stake in UK sales/surplus. The activists never tired of emphasising how this turned the normal Development relationship on its head.

From private ownership capital to participative capital

Participative capital is conceptualised to undo the negative effects of both "expanded reproduction" (intensification of production) and "accumulation by dispossession"

(commodification of global commons), the two dominant neoliberal world economical trends of the 20th century (Harvey 2005, cited in Steur 2011b: 106).

How does one define and measure social vs. financial benefit? The concept of participative capital that undergirds JC's proposed investment models was developed as a result of an exchange visit to the Nagapattinam fishing community on Tamil Nadu's east coast, with whom the Gudalur Adivasis share a traditional livelihood dependence on natural common property resources. The aim of this visit was to learn from them how they had managed to preserve their strong local governance panchayat system, the unity within their community, and their cultural strength, even after the influx of significant amounts of foreign money from hundreds of organisations in the wake of the 2004 tsunami:

> According to outsiders, especially the NGOs who were doing post-tsunami relief and rehabilitation work, the primary mode of production of these fishing economies was similar to the mainstream capitalist economy, in which *ownership* of the means of production (fishing implements) was the primary consideration. Thus their strategies were primarily concerned with redistributing the means of production throughout the society, to both boat owners and previous labourers. They distributed boats, nets and engines amongst the entire population, with a focus on reaching these instruments to those who had not previously owned them. Thus, despite their good intentions, they were misled. Their misconception that ownership over capital was more important than other considerations, such as fishing skill and community norms, led them to misread the 'internal logic' of the fishing communities, particularly the nuances of *participative capital* as it exists in the traditional sharing system. (Jacob 2009)

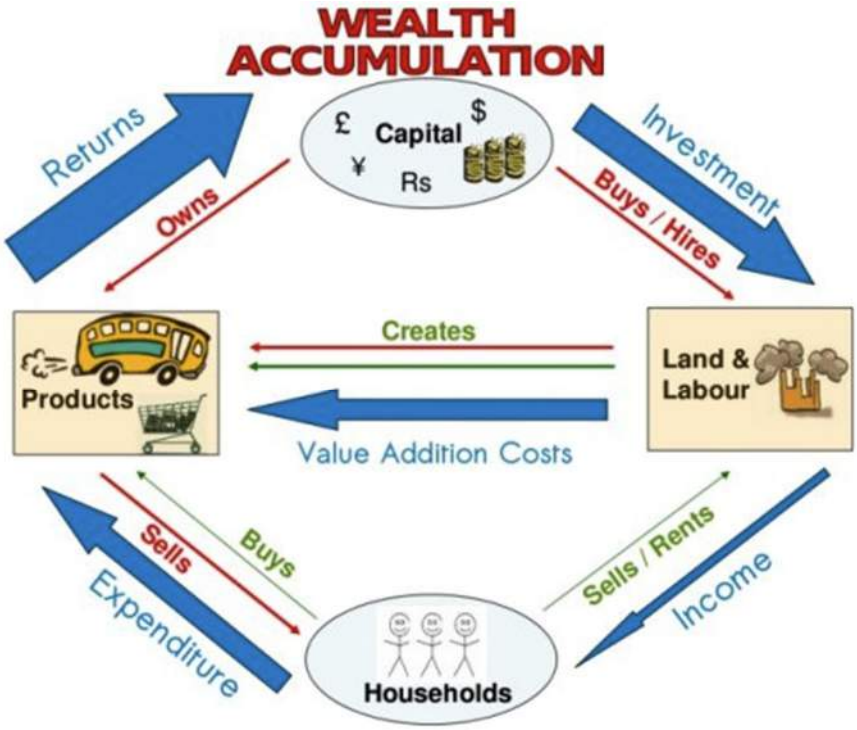

Illustration 22 The capitalist market economy. Source: JC India 2009

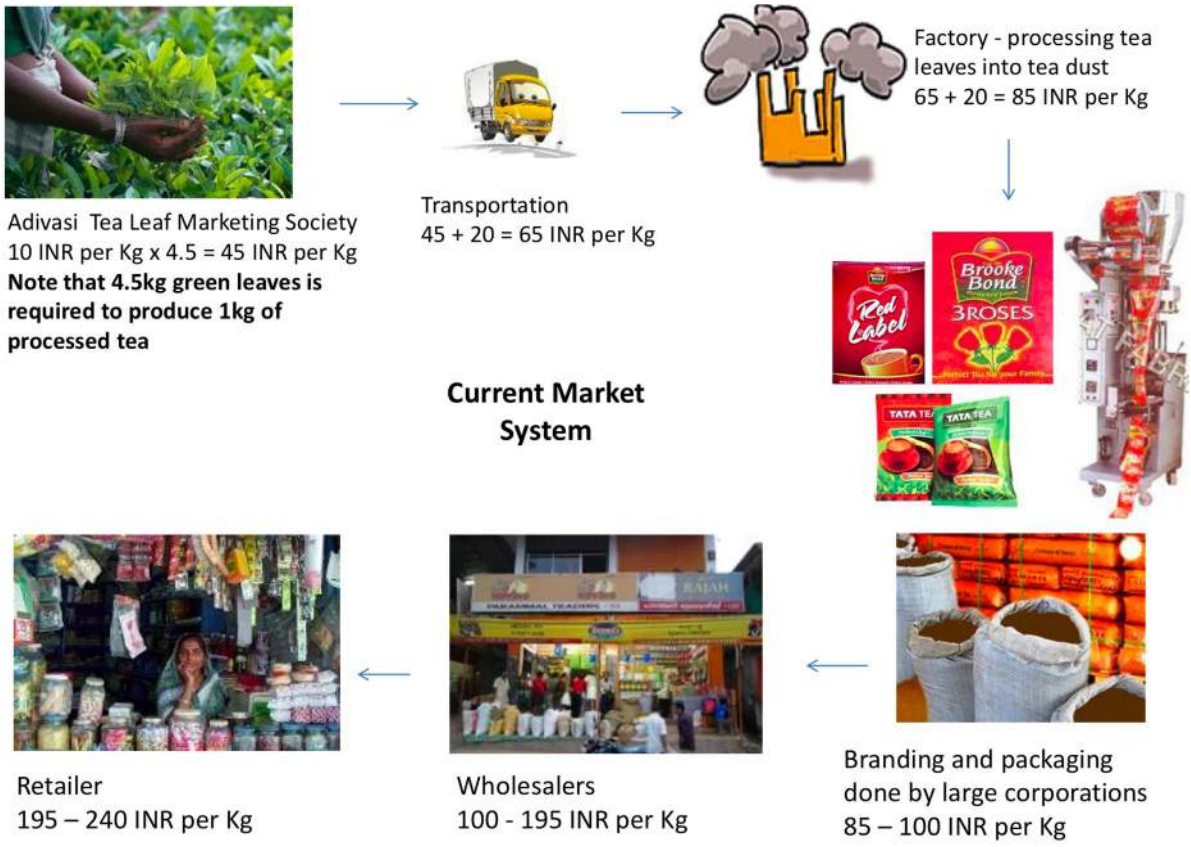

Illustration 23 The current market system. Source: Global Institute for Tomorrow (GIFT)(2011b: 32)

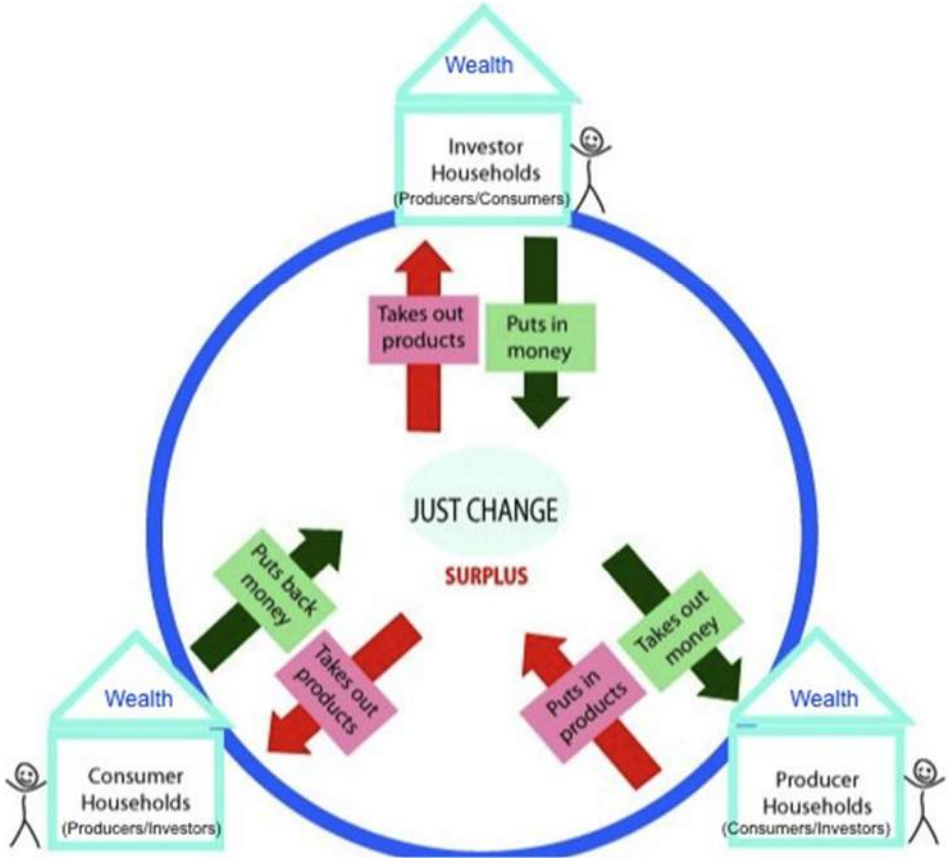

Illustration 24 Participative capital: the JC market economy. Source: Just Change India 2009

Illustration 25 JC and community partner system. Source: Global Institute for Tomorrow (GIFT) (2011b: 33)

In the JC model, capital does not hold ownership rights, as it does in the capitalist model, but only participant rights along with the producers and consumers. An "investor" cannot automatically presume to "own" any surpluses generated through an investment. The division of surplus has to be negotiated with all the three parties who have contributed to its generation: producers, consumers, and investors.

How is this blueprint for economic self-reliance then implemented on the ground?

Operationalising the Just Change concept or "walking the talk"

Just Change India

In India, JC operates through two structures: the Just Change Trust (JCT), a grant-based organisation, and the Just Change India Producer Company (JCIPC), an investment-based organisation.

Just Change India Trust

The Just Change Trust is a grant-based organisation whose task is to spread the JC concept and provide training and support to the community groups who join the JC network. Among

other things, it initiated the Just Change India Producer Company. JCT conducts 1) community-based action research with an emphasis on community-led, inclusive, non-prescriptive research. This includes research on the local economy in Gudalur, Nilambur, and Poovatuparamba (production and marketing systems, income/expenditure and savings/investment patterns, production potential, governance systems), and commodity research on tea, coconut oil, and rice (setting up a database on commodities, prices, markets, production, and value addition methods, identifying relevant commodities for communities, monitoring the movement of markets, developing relationships with regional and national R&D institutions); and 2) conceptual research, e.g. on the concept of participative capital, which seeks to redefine the relationship between labour and capital (see above) and the development of new financial instruments and local community currencies.

Just Change India Producer Company

The JC India Producer Company Limited (JCIPC) was formally registered in January 2006, with varying membership over time of the following producer communities: AMS producing tea, soap, coffee and spices; Bhoodan Vikas Mandal (BVM), Nettikulam, Mallapuram District, Kerala; Paschim Orissa Krishijeevi Sangho (POKS), Bilenjore, Nuapada District, Orissa; Social Agency for Women and Rural Development (SAWARD), Poovatuparamba, Kozhikode District, Kerala; Ramanattukara Grama Nirman Samithi Federation (RGNS), Ramanattukara, Calicut District, Kerala, and Aharam Producer Company, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu.

Based on their membership numbers, each member group owns shares of the company. JCIPC focuses directly on the trading aspects of JC India. It initiated JC Retail, which assisted small groups of women in setting up their own village community shops and Village Consumer Societies (VCSs) in the different villages of AMS, BVM, SAWARD, and RGNS and POKS. JCIPC sources dry groceries (introducing perishable food is more problematic) in bulk directly from producer groups, and then distributes them through the VCSs to individual member households. The aim of this business model is not just to generate profits for the company, but to generate benefit for all the member communities of the company. The surplus generated from JC transactions is used to create a community investment pot. Each group decides the use of their share of the surplus, i.e. whether to invest it in community projects and/or pay out family dividends. Currently, JCIPC has a turnover of about Rs. 50 lakhs (5 million) a year. Goods include tea, coffee, spices, coconut products, and soaps, which they source directly from the members, and rice, coriander, chillies, and tamarind sourced

from other similar producer groups. JCI's aim is to eventually source all products directly from member producer communities. What they are unable to procure in this way, they purchase in bulk from the open market. In 2008, only about 18% was sourced from producers. By 2010 this figure had risen to 60%.

Village Consumer Societies – a decentralised governance model

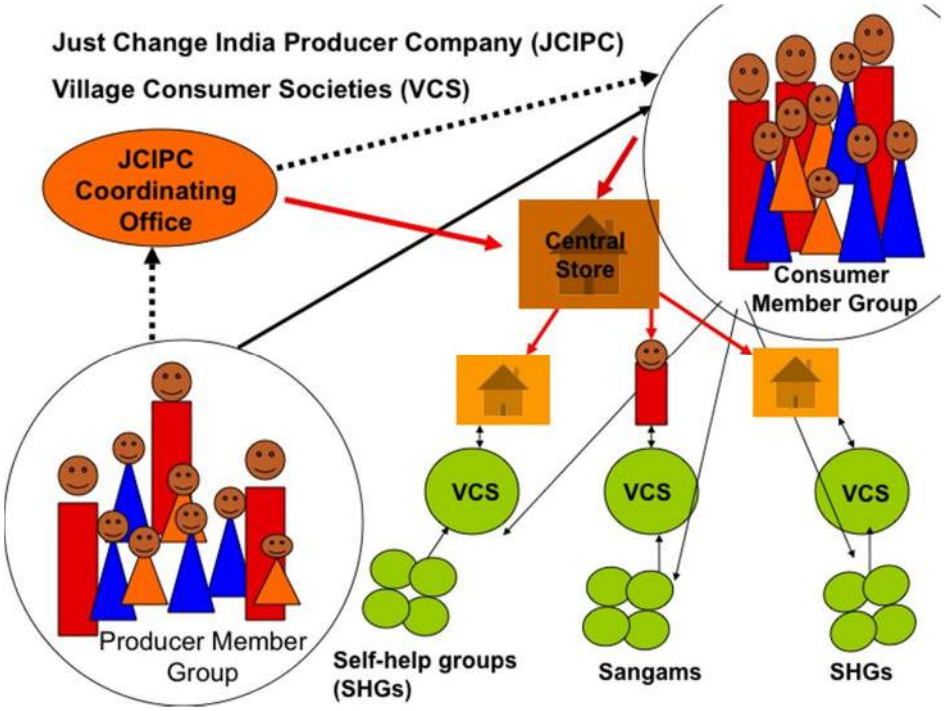

Illustration 26 The decentralised governance model of JC retail and distribution through Village Consumer Societies (VCSs). Source: Just Change India 2009

Product sourcing

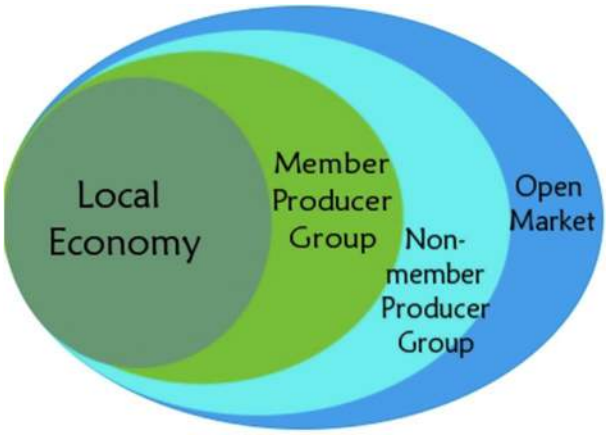

Illustration 27 Levels of product sourcing in JC model. Source: Just Change India 2009

Products

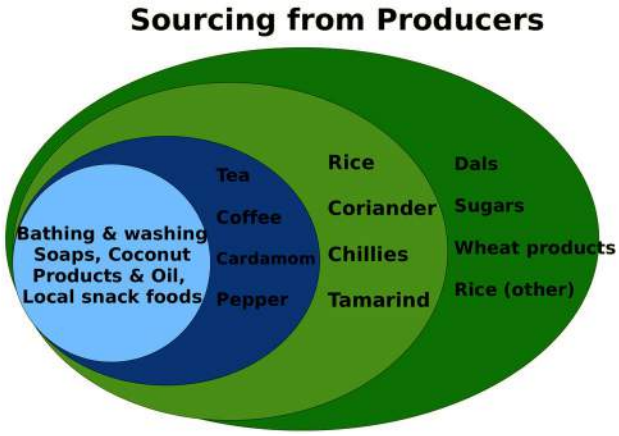

Illustration 28 Levels of product sourcing. Source: Just Change India 2009

Challenges

Fieldwork diary, 10/05/2010, Gudalur

The Just Change branch in Kerala is in real trouble, even after 5 years and all the input. The main problem is credit recovery – even after all the credit has been paid back, they do not have any trading volume.
They do not want to make the same mistake here in Gudalur. They had started trading in the Gudalur area (Kozhikolli, Devarshola). A study was conducted on what was the biggest financial drain. This was found to be rice. They then bought rice wholesale and started selling it. But surrounding shops soon adjusted their prices to remain competitive. They then realised that people did not have enough money to pay back their credit (according to Murthi, "credit recovery" was the problem). As a result, they started savings programmes. Savings coordinators for each area would regularly go around the houses collecting Rs. 10 from each family. Now Bomman (the AMS secretary) has started some trading again.

JCI has faced numerous challenges on an ongoing basis: the scaling up of the business; addressing not only social and political but economic rights; turning the JC concept into a business reality; getting NGOs to work in a business mode, i.e. to harmonise the ways of business with the ethos and values of a political movement ideologically based on tribal tenets; cash flow problems and retrieving credit (to guard against this the AMS itself has, for instance, opted for a savings scheme as a first stage); opposition from local traders who see their profits threatened as JC grows; and maintaining the relationships and trust that JC is dependent on as it expands.

From Just Change India I now travel to Just Change UK.

Just Change UK

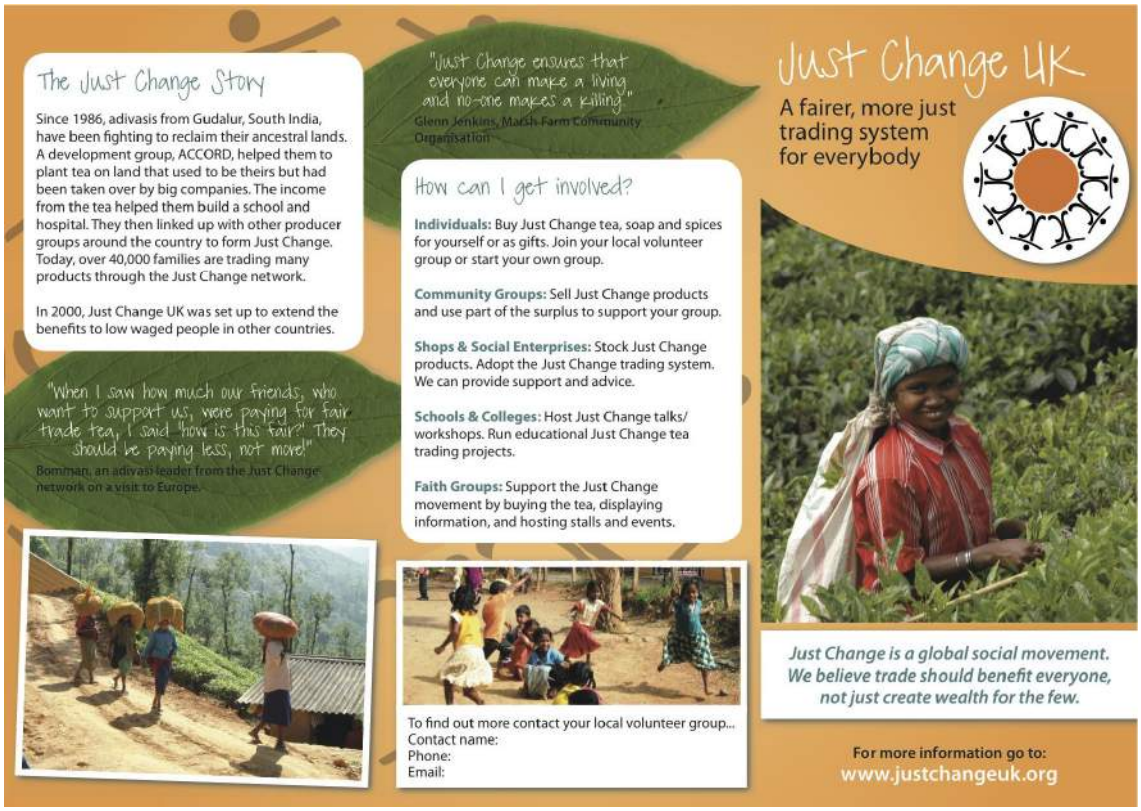

Illustration 29 JCUK pamphlet. Photo: JCUK

Just Change UK (in existence until 2013) had three broad aims: 1) to explore and implement a new economic model of fair trade, by demonstrating how trading surpluses can be reinvested in producer communities (in India), how low-income communities in the UK can also benefit through job creation and more affordable goods, and how social investors can be included in the model as equal partners alongside producers and consumers, 2) to build international solidarity between poor communities in the global south and north through a mutually beneficial trading relationship that fosters personal friendships and directly connects people across the globe, and 3) to promote and educate people about trade justice, by informing people in the UK about Just Change, involving a wider network of local communities and organisations that care about social justice, and by including progressive investors in the JC network.

Conceptually, JC had its origins at least partly in the UK, where the concept developed through contact and in collaboration with different organisations and community groups:

It really struck home when Mari and Stan, founders of ACCORD and Just Change were in Britain in 1994 to do a study of UK poverty (Thekaekara 2000). They were appalled to find people on housing estates in Easterhouse, Glasgow, drinking loads of tea but not being able

to afford Fairtrade tea because it was more expensive. […] This made us think. The "fair" was based on charity from decent westerners, but it did not challenge the power relationships between labour and capital.

Equally, in India, the trade was not fair either. When the Adivasis saw the plight of the dalit (class of "untouchables") women who clean toilets in filthy conditions day in and day out, they said: "Those people are much worse off than us. Let them keep the profits. The fact that we get a fair price for our leaf is more than enough for us." Equally, the women of Kerala state in southern India who watched the Gudalur Adivasis pick tea in pouring rain in cold, misty highland weather were similarly affected. "Their work is so difficult," they said. "We must buy this tea and spread the word."

So here were communities right across the market spectrum, "rich" and "poor", in both India and in Britain, who are subjected to forces outside their control. We asked: "Why not link these groups?" And so Just Change was born as a different way to trade between communities. In order to put this idea into practice, in 2002, with the help of a grant from Oxfam, Just Change UK (JCUK) was formed and imported a tonne of tea directly from the Adivasis. JCUK volunteers in Manchester, London, Birmingham, Norwich and Cambridge – young people who had returned inspired from study visits to the Nilgiris – agreed to sell tea to friends, families and local communities. A core group of people working in international development and community empowerment in the UK, also came together to take legal responsibility and steer the development of this new initiative.

In 2005 and 2007, two groups of Adivasis visited the UK. At a workshop hosted by the New Economics Foundation, they met residents from Marsh Farm estate in Luton, one of the poorest housing estates in the country. As they exchanged their stories – eviction and homelessness, followed by land rights and squatting – they recognised much that they had in common, including a similar analysis and understanding of the problems and potential solutions. Since that first meeting this sense of "global solidarity" has been strengthened through personal friendships, maintained for the most part by email and Marsh Farm has become the first community partner to join JCUK. (Just Change UK 2008)

Establishing JC in the UK (Just Change UK 2006) necessitated a different approach to the one taken by JCI. In India, JC builds on established people's movements centred around issues of social justice, and workers', women's and indigenous rights. The UK presented a very different picture in terms of trading, community/volunteer group structure, different target groups, and markets:

Though they agreed with the concept and wanted to be a part of it they found it difficult to move it to any significant level thanks to being invariably short staffed and having to respond to innumerable other pressures and having to meet innumerable deadlines. Coping with their existing workload was hard enough and so any new initiative unless it was sufficiently resourced would always take the back seat.

Finally, we realised that these groups were not mobilised the way community groups are in India – with a history of collective action which had led to creating a strong collective identity. In India, if a few key people were convinced about an idea it was not too huge a task to spread this to all their other members.

But in the UK, it is always quite a huge task for these groups to communicate and convince their members.

We felt that if were to achieve levels of trading that would be viable we would first have to do some community development work – mobilising the communities in a way that would enable them to engage with their own organisations more effectively.

If we do not develop a strategy that can work with more disadvantaged communities then we are not likely to be offering something very different from fair trade. (Thekaekara 2004c)

Selling tea in the UK thus presented very different challenges, as there are by and large no longer producer communities on an Indian scale who trade goods directly with each other.

In practice, JCUK was a UK-registered company that imported tea directly from Gudalur. It was shipped to Northern Tea Merchants in Chesterfield, where it was bagged and put into JC packets. From there it was distributed across the north of England and to Marsh Farm in Luton who delivered it across the south of England through local volunteer groups and shops, adding no mark up except to pay overhead costs. This meant that individuals and community groups could get involved in JCUK, and buy fairly traded goods without having to pay over the odds. This became increasingly more difficult as overhead costs and competition in the low-cost fair trade tea sector increased (mainly driven by supermarket price dumping policies). The cost of JC products was determined on the principle of a partnership between farmers and consumers. This meant that it was up to the consumer to decide how much they wanted or could afford to add to the minimum price. When JC tea was sold through a shop, the shop decided how much to add to the minimum price.

JCUK was also involved in education work with schools and collaborated with ActionAid on the "Chembakolli tea pack" teaching materials.

The key players I – volunteer groups

JC London

Establised: 2005. Core members were Dave Tucker (former campaigns manager for War on Want who left JCUK to build The Beyond Tourism Company) – chair, Eva Watkinson (an ActionAid campaigner) – money, Lara Gatrix (a speech therapist) – stock manager, Lucy Horitz (former fundraising director for London Children's Ballet) – sales, Ed Owles (a freelance film-maker who directed the 2006 short film "A New Leaf" on JC), Tricia Zipfel (who works freelance in community development and public policy) and former JCUK Project Manager Louise Taplin (currently Fairtrade Foundation). JC London was the distribution hub for London and the SE, working closely with Marsh Farm to identify partners, and deliver tea to them on a regular basis.

JC Manchester

Established: late 2004. Core members/activities: Lucy (worked with communities for SureStart), Graeme (a youth worker seeking funding for a PhD at the time), Jess (Masters in International Development), and Julie (worked for a social housing provider). Lucy carried out the invoicing for retailers, and along with the rest of the Manchester group, maintained relationships with northern retailers (mainly Unicorn, 8th Day) and Northern Tea Merchants. They also sold JC products at community events, as well as to friends and family. They had been instrumental in the development of JCUK since its inception.

JC Oxford

Established: July 2010. Core members: Martin Yapp (did the first ever Development from the Inside course in Mysore), Zuzana Hrdlckova (did anthropological research among Nilgiri tribes), Sabita Banerji (used to work at Oxfam, then with Cecily's Fund, a Zambian education charity; she was born and brought up on a Munnar tea estate). Its main activity was to build strong links with community organisations. They were selling about 50 packs/month to shops, cafes, faith groups (Quakers), and friends and family, and established links with Blackbird Leys – one of Europe's biggest council housing estates, which they hoped to develop into another Marsh Farm type relationship.

JC Durham

After my return from fieldwork in July 2010 I set up the JC volunteer group, selling tea, designing promotion materials for JCUK, giving talks about JC to the Durham Development Abroad Society and the Ustinov College Seminar, and exploring possible links and forging relationships with community groups in County Durham and the North-East (e.g. via Kate Welch at Acumen in Peterlee, Jenny Medhurst at North-South Trading in Stockton, and rekindling previous JC links with Roseberry Community Sports College in Chester-le-Street).

The key players II – community groups

JC Marsh Farm

Barathan had an incisive point to make. "Everywhere people have been kind to us", he said. "But MF is different. These are people like us. They are not just in solidarity because they support us, they've struggled like us. So they understand us as if we are the same people". (Marcel Thekaekara 2008c)

JC Marsh Farm as an emerging community enterprise, selling tea on the estate (New Economics Foundation 2006) across Luton, and supplying volunteers and other community members in the south and midlands. It aimed to create local jobs and therefore needed to generate enough surplus to cover these costs – initially an ambitious target of around 12

tonnes turnover of tea per annum was suggested. Their plan was to develop JCUK trading activities as part of a broader strategy of enterprise and job creation on the estate.

Burton Street Foundation

Is a well-established Development trust running a range of small enterprises in a deprived part of Sheffield. BSF wanted to incorporate tea (and other JC products) into their local café, health programmes, etc., and also to develop a role as the JCUK distribution hub for Sheffield and South Yorkshire (possibly North Yorkshire as well). The aim was to generate supplementary income for people with learning difficulties rather than a living wage. This was made possible by people on long-term benefits now being able to earn up to £92 per week without loss of benefits).

Shoreditch Trust

Is a relatively new development trust set up to take forward the NDC (New Deal for Communities) programmes in south Hackney. They wanted to involve local residents in JCUK in order to develop local enterprise and build wider community connections that would raise awareness and motivate people.

Emmaus

Is a Brighton-based project that used JC tea in their café and sold it to their customers.

The key players III – trustees

The third group of key players in JCUK at the time of my research were the Board of Directors (of which I became a member) whose membership varied according to members' multiple commitments: Audrey Bronstein (Oxfam), Chris Mowles (Hertfordshire Business School), Martin Simon (Time Banking UK), Nikki van der Gaag (New Internationalist), Tricia Zipfel, Lucy Gash, Dave Tucker (see above).

Challenges

During its existence JCUK faced several challenges of its own: how to reinvest the trading surplus in the producer communities in India, how to find ways for low-income communities in the UK to benefit from participation in JC through job creation and more affordable goods, and how social investors could be brought on board in the model as equal partners alongside producers and consumers.

*

A visual postscript

For a more visual overview of Just Change I created an academic poster:

Just Change – from poverty to power-tea?
https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/profiles/6893/ClaudiaAufschnaiterJustChangePosterFinalsmall.pdf

*

Interlude

Having explored Adivasi self-reliance aspirations in their theoretical and practical incarnations, as envisioned by AMS/ACCORD, in India and the UK, I now depart from the UK back to India, to meet the exponents of, and explore the second central concept of this thesis, Adivasi indigeneities, in the next ethnographic chapter, "Stories of Adivasi indigeneities".

STORIES OF ADIVASI INDIGENEITIES

"Adivasis are India's cultural epicentre. India is a country born out of 'illegitimate' relationships. The white race, that always came to pillage, has turned a tad brownish because of their mixing with Adivasis. How else did Indian culture get so diverse and Indian languages so rich? Thus, India is a country of bastards."
Ram Dayal Munda (Tehelka 2010)

Chapter map:

Part I

Adivasi indigeneities and the transnational sphere

Part II

Adivasi indigeneities in India

Part III

Adivasi indigeneities in Gudalur and beyond

Part IV

Dominant activist narratives and narrative strategies

Prelude

Following the what, why, where, who, when and how, and some terminological considerations in "Some opening thoughts", a discussion of methodology in "Behind the scenes – methods and tools", and a sketch of the evolution of AMS/ACCORD's Development agenda in theory and practice in "Stories of Adivasi self-reliance", I arrive at the core research theme and the central objects of analysis in this story: "Stories of Adivasi indigeneities" in the transnational, national, and local spheres.

In an inward-zooming motion from the global to the local, the aim of this chapter is threefold: Firstly, in Part I, to investigate, on one side of the coin, the influence of global indigeneity discourses on Adivasis, and in particular (tribal and non-tribal) Adivasi activists in India, and on the other side, the production of Adivasi indigeneities in the global arena, and the resulting emergence of the "cosmopolitan Adivasi". Secondly, in Part II, I trace the development of Adivasi indigeneities in India, both on the national and regional level. Thirdly, in Part III, I examine how these different Adivasi and other indigeneity story threads meet in Gudalur,[12] and demonstrate how activists there hybridise these diverse (and often divergent) indigeneity narratives in order to harness them for various social movement and

[12] See the sub-chapter "Where" in "Setting the scene" in "Some opening thoughts" on Gudalur's (trans. *crossroads*) role as a meeting place of different peoples, cultures, ideas, climatic zones, etc.

Development ends, to build the organisation's self-reliance agenda. Fourthly, and finally, in Part IV, I introduce the dominant activist narratives of Adivasi indigeneity and the activists' narrative strategies.

For the first part, *Adivasi indigeneities and the transnational*, I, inter alia, take inspiration from my work with two international tribal/indigenous activist organisations, the Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker (GfbV) (Society for Threatened Peoples) since 2005 and Survival International in 2011, and my work with Just Change UK since 2010.

For the second part of this chapter, *Adivasi indigeneities in India*, I draw on a) my personal engagement with Adivasi activist organisations in South India since 2003, such as the Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation (TAF), CORD and the National Adivasi Alliance in Karnataka, and culminating in AMS/ACCORD in Gudalur, and b) the emerging literature on Adivasi studies (cf. Rycroft and Dasgupta 2011b).

For the third part on *Adivasi indigeneities in Gudalur and beyond* and the fourth part on *Dominant activist narratives and narrative strategies* I call on my involvement with AMS/ACCORD's work since 2007, and my work as a volunteer and researcher first for the Culture Centre (CC), or First Peoples Place/Interactive Centre for Indigenous Cultures, an AMS/ACCORD project in Gudalur, in 2009/10, and subsequent work for and with them up to the present.

Thematically, this chapter discusses the multiple marginalisations and minoritisations of indigenous peoples (IP), with IP both being, and being represented, as on the margins of the state and of modernity, and thus on the periphery of the periphery of dominant societal processes. As Nair (2008: 6) writes, "[i]ndigenous communities, which are inherently linked to the process of modernization, are placed outside the sphere of modernization". At the same time, I attempt a conceptual move beyond entrenched oppositions, such as tradition vs. modernity, state vs. IP/rural peasants/etc. (see Bates 1995: 117), to take into account IP's own alternative contemporary modernities. This touches on issues of indigenous self-representation and -determination, sovereignty, self-government and autonomy, and on issues of loss and subsequent resurgence of indigenous identities. This is connected to the global spread of the indigeneity narrative, and the concomitant rise of indigenism as a political mobilisation strategy in various localities – often proving to be a double-edged sword though for IP. This produces local, global, and glocal indigeneity narratives and positionalities, testifying to the multidimensionality and conceptual fluidity of the concept of indigeneity at the beginning of the 21st century, arising out of the complex political and economic projects it is harnessed to and for. On the part of the scholar, this necessitates the conceptual weighing of

the strengths and weaknesses of a concept hinged on un-tethered and fluid indigenous identity constructions, i.e. to gauge its conceptual resilience by analysing the social reality and impact of the idea of indigeneity. This covers an analysis of the indigenist narrative strategies of deconstructionism vs. strategic essentialism, the deconstruction of essentialising dichotomies between tribal/indigenous/Adivasi and non-tribal/indigenous/Adivasi, and the exposure of claims to racial purity, and neo-traditionalist and ethno-nationalist tendencies that indigenism often harbours. I also broach the specific imaginations of indigenous peoples held by alter-globalisation activists, and issues of re/presentation in connection with decolonisation and postcolonialism, i.e. decolonisation through critique of external representations and reappropriation of self-representation. Lastly, I touch on issues of authenticity and its production, and the specificities of Asian/Indian/Adivasi indigeneities.

Before travelling to Gudalur and its indigeneity narrative workshop in Parts III and IV, I now cast the spotlight, in Part I, on the interplay of Adivasi and transnational IP discourses, and then, in Part II, on the Indian indigeneity sphere, with special reference to South India.

Part I

Adivasi indigeneities and the transnational indigeneity sphere

The influence of global indigeneity discourses in India

The global imagination of indigenous peoples is informed by the imagination of a global ethnoscape and a postnational global order. Global imaginaries of indigeneity in turn influence local manifestations of indigenousness. As Ghosh (2006: 519) advises us, "we have to look at how a global, deterritorialized imagination of indigenousness invokes and signifies new effects of locality".

In India, the idea of an indigenous collectivity (Rycroft and Dasgupta 2011a: 7) has found much resonance. At the same time, the battle for "indigenous" Adivasi identities is in full flow, mirrored and cross-fertilised by so-called "indigenous" peoples' struggles elsewhere, and the 2006 Forest Rights Act enabling the redress of "historical injustices", on the basis of the ability of a particular category of people to prove the anteriority of their land occupancy. The transnational concept of indigeneity has in this context had an enormous influence on the emergence of distinct Adivasi indigeneities in India, in which the "indigenous" Adivasi base their claim to land on a primordial, kinship-like connection to this land, and a continuity of inhabitancy that antecedes that of others. The international IP land rights discourse has therefore had a profound impact on tribal peoples in India in terms of uniting peoples with

various tribal affiliations across community divisions under the umbrella term "Adivasi", on a hitherto unprecedented scale. In this regard, the notion of indigeneity has served both as a catalyst and vehicle for Adivasi mobilisation.

Adivasis, however, are not the only contenders for the designation "indigenous", in an Indian polity starkly divided along ethnic and religious boundaries. In this they have "leapfrogged" the state (van Schendel 2011: 26), and its Hindu-nationalist ideology that all of India's population is "indigenous" (which precludes any separate category of indigeneity for the so-called Scheduled Tribes in the national context). Adivasis thereby automatically position themselves in conflict with any other contenders for the label "indigenous" and its accompanying entitlements.

How did tribal people in India come to clothe themselves in distant accoutrements? Kjosavik (2006: 5), for instance, observes that it was "[t]he international movement of indigenous peoples [that] provided a discursive momentum for Kerala's adivasi movement", in the sense that "[i]dioms and adages employed in distant geographies were co-opted and rephrased in the articulation of adivasi identities and their struggles for land." How did this (re)indigenisation of Adivasis, stimulated by the rise of indigenism worldwide, in turn come about? One way has been through creating alliances. Steur (2011b: 94) draws our attention to the fact that "[i]t was only with the break-down of the myth of development in the 1980s and the moment of solidarity between the rural poor and Indians, that global environmentalist-indigenous alliances became legitimate and possible". This had the consequence of ideological unification, since, inevitably, this adoption of translocal identity labels was accompanied by a unification and erasure of local identities, in that,

> [m]icro-identities were subsumed under the adivasi umbrella. This, I would argue, was a tactical positioning adopted by the indigenous movement to swing the conjunctural imperatives of the indigenous politics in the international and national arenas to their advantage. (Kjosavik 2006: 5)

In today's terms, "indigenous" is understood to imply cultural vitality, and the transcendence of static tribal boundaries, which are increasingly perceived to be a remnant of 18th century colonial classifications of tribes and castes. That the notion of indigeneity has superseded that of tribality, and has become a much more powerful political tool at the beginning of the 21st century, can be traced to the localisation and intensification of ethnic boundaries, as one of the responses to globalisation. As van Schendel (2011: 25) argues, "'indigenous people' turns 'tribe' upside down" and "the idea of indigeneity marginalizes the 'mainstream' and unsettles the hierarchical assumptions of civilization vs. wildness". Steur also (2011b: 106) notes the shift from class-based to identity-based mobilisation:

> [s]tructural transformations that characterize the age of late capitalism – notably the shift from expanded reproduction to accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2005) – have often made explicit class-based mobilisation ineffective. As a result people turn to internationally more powerful genres such as that of indigenism: "peasant activists became indigenous activists to utilize the international cachet of indigenous politics" (Tsing 2007: 47). The success of indigenous movements thus often lies precisely in their ability to "bring together familiar demands for social justice and the language of indigenous rights" (ibid.).

She identifies four present-day indigenist currents: organic, autonomous, democratic, and communist (Steur 2011b: 91f.). AMS/ACCORD's indigenist rhetoric comes closest to organic indigenism, in that it "stresses the direct practical steps that can be taken towards such a political ideal [the vision of being independent from the multinationals dictating global agriculture today], starting with the redistribution of land" (ibid.).

In international academic circles, the validity of the concepts tribe, tribal, Adivasi, and IP, and the transitions in their conceptual usage, are vociferously debated. These terms have repeatedly been exposed as colonial, missionary, imperialist, or nationalist constructs (dependent on the cause they were instrumentalised for). The people defining themselves as tribe, tribal, Adivasi, indigenous (to mention only a small selection of the existing terminology), and those people working for and with them, have, however, long ago appropriated the concept. They are actively mixing, reconfiguring, and reinventing it to suit particular localised needs. Equally, as I demonstrate in the case study below, "The double eye", local and cosmopolitan notions of Adivasiness have become, and are actively blurred by Adivasis and non-Adivasis alike. Not surprisingly, this also leads to contradictions and problematic situations, not least because, as Li (2001: 653) has observed,

> Those who demand that their rights be acknowledged must fill the places of recognition that others provide, using dominant languages and demanding a voice in bureaucratic and other power-saturated encounters, even as they seek to stretch, reshape, or even invert the meanings implied.

How have the international templates available for indigenous peoples then shaped imaginations of Adivasi indigeneity in India? Has this led to the emergence of the "cosmopolitan" Adivasi?

The "internationalisation" of Adivasi indigeneities – the cosmopolitan Adivasi?

While it would go beyond the scope of this thesis to include a detailed comparative account of indigenous peoples' experiences with the internationalisation of debates led by and affecting them (see, for instance, Cameron 2001, 2004, Hodgson 2002, 2009, and Igoe 2006), it is worth highlighting some of the predicaments and the complexity of such internationalisation that (certain) Adivasi communities too have encountered in their participation in international indigeneity debates across the world.

An exchange Kaushik Ghosh (2006: 517) describes in his article "Between Global Flows and Local Dams: Indigenousness, Locality, and the Transnational Sphere in Jharkhand, India", between him and a Jharkhandi Adivasi leader/activist, is emblematic of the – in this case – jarring effect of middle-class, bourgeois Indian fantasies of ideal villages – here located on the side of a mountain in Switzerland – entering the imagination of an Adivasi utopia by an Adivasi activist, as a result of a visit to Switzerland in the course of participating in UN indigenous peoples' fora. Here Switzerland becomes a "template for a future Jharkhand" (Ghosh 2006: 518), a fantasy that

> embodies a desire of the bourgeois subjects of marginalized modernities to have a heady, heavenly concoction of innocence and modern development—unspoiled nature, white as the alpine snow; yet it oozes with the wealth and luxuries of modernity, a wealth that seems to leave no scratches on the surface of the earth. (Ghosh 2006: 517)

Similarly, Ghosh diagnoses international organisations' activities concerning indigenous peoples, such as those of the World Bank, as exhibiting what Spivak (1988, cited in Ghosh 2006: 521) has termed "white men saving brown women from brown men". In the case of the afore-mentioned Adivasi leadership, this has the effect of deterritorialising their activities and statements, i.e. they lay claim to representing Adivasis trans-regionally and trans-nationally, however, in fact they become disconnected from concrete local struggles of specific tribal groups. The sphere of cosmopolitan Adivasiness, I argue, is one largely removed from the concerns of the majority of tribal villages, both because the struggles fought by the latter become disembodied case studies for cosmopolitan Adivasi activist debates, and because international connections forged by the latter do not always translate into tangible positive changes on the village-level, despite claims to the contrary. Ultimately, cosmopolitanism is an elite concern, in AMS/ACCORD's case reserved for those Adivasis "deserving" of international exposure, such as nurses, teachers, and animators, i.e. those with biographies of Development success, that the majority of Adivasis are not able to participate in.

Adivasi tribality and indigeneity are transformed quite differently when transnationalised. On the one hand, it is often the figure of the tribal that allows cosmopolitan social actors to come to terms with the paradoxes of their class origins and political commitments. This engenders unexpected alliances between the tribal and the transnational cosmopolitan spheres, offering a different mode of being Indian to both Adivasis and non-Adivasis.

Unfortunately, on the other hand, one of the ramifications of the very plurality of tribal identities in India is that it allows for a type of supermarket mentality when it comes to their transfer to the international plane. By this I mean that it is largely those Adivasi cultures adhering most closely to non-Adivasi stereotypes and misconceptions that are foregrounded

in cosmopolitan discourses – in short, those cultures deemed worth saving for their distinctiveness, and thus supposed contribution to the cultural biodiversity pool. I found that, typically, these were those Adivasi groups that had been "able" to and had actively retained cultural traits that distinguished them from the surrounding "mainstream" population, such as the Chola Naicken in the Nilambur Forests of northern Kerala, who still lived in caves, as emphasised by some activists, or the Warli of Maharashtra/Gujarat with their distinctive style of painting, as opposed to, for instance, Adivasis who have had to migrate to cities and as a result lost their cultural distinctiveness. Even though activists would be loathe to acknowledge it, I noticed a distinct hierarchy of cultural worth expressed in terms of how unique activists thought certain Adivasi cultures to be or to what extent these exhibited unique or peculiar cultural traits. Whether these were "original", adopted or invented did not appear to matter greatly, as long as they corresponded to certain stereotypical activist imaginaries, analysed in greater detail later in the thesis. This is a conclusion I have come to as a result of my long-standing work with the transnational indigenous rights organisation Society for Threatened Peoples (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker in Germany and Austria), who first initiated an Adivasi Campaign in Europe in 1993 (Berweger 1992), and my comparison of the latter with present-day high-tech mobilisation (such as the Dongria Kondh/Niyamgiri campaign by Survival International, facebook activism by Adivasi activists such as Gladson Dungdung, the Internet presence of mainly Jharkhandi NGOs working with Adivasis, etc.), and my recent consulting work in 2011 for Survival International on the anti-racism against Adivasis campaign "Proud Not Primitive".

The emergence of the cosmopolitan Adivasi from the figure of the tribal can thus invoke and reinforce a certain type of exclusivist eco-romanticism. This, in turn, is an expression of the phenomenon that globalisation not only engenders cosmopolitanism and openness, but also increasing localisation and exclusion on the basis of ethnicity and territoriality. At the same time, I emphasise, cosmopolitanism does not automatically amount to openness and localisation does not exclusively entail exclusion. Above all, the very hyper-fusion of these different social phenomena creates unexpected and unpredictable results (see, for instance, Mookherjee 2011).

I now turn to a comparative case study of the transnationalisation of Adivasi identity constructions situated within AMS/ACCORD.

Case study: "The double eye" (Marcel Thekaekara 2001) – AMS/ACCORD Adivasi visits to Germany and Adivasi Tee Projekt (ATP) visits to Gudalur

For reasons of space, the introductory story to this case study, "The Double Eye" (Marcel Thekaekara 2001), can be found in Appendix 8. This is the story of the first meeting of Adivasis of the AMS and members of the ATP.

This case study illuminates an aspect of Adivasi external relations that is unique to AMS/ACCORD in its scope and nature, viz. the transnational dimension embodied by AMS/ACCORD's "special" international relationships. This manifests itself both in the form of frequent exposure to short- and long-term international visitors (like myself) in Gudalur, and in the form of exchange visits to the UK and Germany, where the longest and deepest link has been with the Evangelische Studentengemeinde (ESG; Protestant Student Community) in Heidelberg. It is out of this ongoing relationship that, inter alia, the Adivasi Tee Projekt (ATP) developed, a project-implementing Development organisation that today consists of around 50 volunteers spread across Germany and one full-time staff member.

Specifically, I compare here the exchange between Gudalur and Germany since 1994 with AMS/ACCORD's link with JCUK. The link with Germany is an exchange situated within an international Development education paradigm about the symbolic and actual linking of Asia and Europe, India and Europe, and the indigenous and non-indigenous. The link with the UK, as detailed in the previous chapter, is based on a more economic rationale of connecting poor producers and consumers through tea. Both of these links have contributed to the development of AMS/ACCORD's particular understanding of indigeneity, and the manipulation of this indigeneity discourse to forge discursive tools for furthering their political self-determination and economic self-reliance agenda. These exchanges also provide vivid examples of the framing of individual Adivasis' lifestories according to different development filters, depending on who is the audience.

Though Germany is one of AMS/ACCORD's earliest and vital international links (both in economic as well as emotional terms), it is worth emphasising that it represents only one of the many story threads out of which the NGO founders, as the chief interlingual interpreters and intercultural mediators, weave AMS/ACCORD's Adivasi indigeneity fabric, as applied in everyday interaction. Nevertheless, in my judgement, it is AMS/ACCORD's best developed, because most reciprocal, personal, intergenerational, and egalitarian international link. In contrast to the German link the UK link is, on the one hand, more donor-focussed, and thus inherently more hierarchical through AMS/ACCORD's collaboration with, but also partial financial dependence, on major funders, viz. Charities Advisory Trust, ActionAid, and

Christian Aid. Understandably, this is not to the liking of the NGO founders, but somewhat unavoidable. On the other hand, the JCUK link is more economically and less culturally (Adivasi) oriented than ATP, thanks to the Just Change (JC) trade network, which seeks to correct economic power imbalances in international trade in general.

The German connection is also more stable than the UK one, firstly for the simple reason that it has continued uninterruptedly for much longer, and is thus more established. Secondly, it is a classic charity-based Development organisation of a less experimental nature than the linking of economically disadvantaged UK and Indian communities through trade.

In Germany, ATP rests on the foundations of an existing organisation (the ESG), which is financially independent through its self-renewing student membership, and on a network of extended families that developed out of these former students. Not insignificantly, the ESG's expressly political past and self-image as a radical Christian group resonates somewhat with the ACCORD founders' background in Marxist and liberation theology. JCUK, on the other hand, only had a project manager funded by an Esmee Fairbairn grant for two-and-a-half years and throughout its existence (until 2013) struggled to break even with tea/spice sales and grant money only.

Thanks to my involvement both with AMS/ACCORD in Gudalur and JCUK, I observed, through talking with UK and German volunteers, that, more than anything else, the personal involvement with Gudalur, the friendships developed and maintained with people there, and ongoing familiarity with AMS/ACCORD' work through its blogs and newsletters, was a guarantor for sustained volunteer involvement and "faithfulness" to the project. In Germany this personal connection is maintained via various channels: the biyearly exchange visits (financed through members' donations, the selling of AMS tea, soaps and other products, and external fundraising events, such as at the German Kirchtag – Church Day), internal newsletters (in addition to the AMS newsletter), and the familiarity of ATP children having grown up in the ATP family network with stories about Gudalur and the project, having drummed and sang with Adivasis on their visits to Germany, and finally having volunteered themselves in Gudalur. That expectations/stories and ground realities in Gudalur at different points in time often do not match, was an issue experienced rather painfully, but with hindsight also salutarily (in the eye-opening sense of a real "Development experience", as opposed to sanitised Development stories and theory removed from reality) by a German medical student volunteer at the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital, with whom I shared a flat during part of my time in Gudalur.

The network in the UK was more dispersed and less internally connected than the largely kin-based Indian and German counterparts. This was the case even though almost all JCUK members had a connection of one kind or another to Gudalur, either through having been there, i.e. having participated in the Development from the Inside (DftI) course the ACCORD founders used to run every summer, or having volunteered in the GAH or at Vidyodaya Adivasi Study Centre, or through having worked with AMS/ActionAid Chembakolli materials developed for the UK geography primary school curriculum. This was also the case despite conscious efforts to develop a "JCUK family", along the lines of the "Gudalur family" and the "ATP family", through (highly promising and motivating) JCUK annual national meetings.

Interestingly, while JCUK volunteers such as myself were only cursorily acquainted with each other, we felt more connected with each other on the basis of supporting a cause, i.e. that of the Gudalur Adivasi tea story, of creating a new economic system, and doing economic relationships differently. We were less connected on the basis of family or friendship obligations towards each other. This fact made me wonder whether this was one of the reasons why attempts at nurturing a JCUK family, mainly on the basis of thematic bonds and through social media tools such as facebook and twitter, were not really successful (in that the uptake by members was not significant). Time, both in the sense of duration of existence and restriction, may have been a factor too.

I argue that what was lacking in the UK was the equivalent of the head(s) of family represented by AMS/ACCORD's founders in India (even though they have been trying to rid themselves – until now unsuccessfully – of this designation ever since ACCORD's inception), and certain key ATP members in Germany. This may, for instance, explain the UK project manager's reluctance to take over the administrative management of a JCUK facebook group, and thus the decision power of who to admit as members. This was complicated by the question whether to make it an open or a closed group and what the membership criteria for the latter would be (i.e. who to accept into the "JC fold" – anyone interested in the JC concept, only active volunteers, or anyone familiar with AMS/ACCORD).

Varying volunteer commitment and retention was more of an issue in the UK than in Germany. In the UK, the issue of volunteer retention was an ongoing problem, especially after the DftI course ceased to exist in its popular form, following which JCUK struggled to recruit new members. As I demonstrate in the JCUK case study at the end of Part IV of this chapter, this was strongly linked to the renewability of motivating factors and rewards (e.g. news or visits from Gudalur).

The above points have direct consequences for a number of issues, the main one being volunteer support. Emotional and practical support, and volunteer attachment, may be more forthcoming and have fewer barriers to overcome in kin-based networks, in that it is easier to keep track of and take care of "family" members. On the other hand, as I experienced in Gudalur, as opposed to the UK, and as discussed above, it is inherently more difficult, on the one hand, to be adopted into and become part of a close-knit, trust-based NGO family (consisting of consanguinal, affinal as well as fictive kin; see below), and, on the other hand, to be able to quit this family. This is, in certain situations, even perceived to amount to betrayal, and carries more dire consequences than quitting a non-kin based network, where terms of membership are more clearly outlined and less emotionally charged. An example for this was the recent exit of one of the key JC staff, following a "family conflict" involving an inappropriate NGO-internal relationship that led to both parties not being able to "show their faces" (Mari) any more within AMS/ACCORD. This, in turn, led to the serious imperilment of one of the projects' continued viability. This demonstrates the importance of getting the balance between openness and exclusivity of NGO membership right.

Whether the kinship bonds within NGOs are consanguinal, i.e. employing the offspring of NGO founders; affinal, i.e. NGO workers or their children marrying amongst each other; or fictive, i.e. "adopting" ideologically like-minded people in the case of movement-based NGOs, the same tight kinship bonds that can nurture incredible creativity and commitment in an organisation, can turn toxic when individual (such as love) interests become more important than communal interests. In an NGO setting this often has more widespread negative ramifications than in the case of non-related co-workers. Equally, an over-reliance on key workers can be as endangering to an organisation's viability as over-emphasis on kinship bonds. This was evidenced by the passing of one of the organisation's key staff members who, since his joining in the mid-1990s, had become one of the organisations' chief intercultural communicators and storytellers responsible for weaving and holding together AMS/ACCORD's different indigeneity storylines for its different audiences.

To summarise, while it may certainly be NGOs' desire to "keep things in the family", in order to achieve maximum employee loyalty, I would argue that this needs to be offset by the periodical admission of new non-kin staff members into the organisation, to prevent intellectual stagnation and help offset existence-threatening risks such as illness and internal conflict.

We have seen by now that different factors, ranging from the duration of the association, to relative ideological affinity, to financial stability, to kinship, play a role in the quality of the

relationships AMS/ACCORD entertains with its international partners. Most importantly, however, I argue that the nature of these relationships is influenced by how well, and how widely the stories signifying cross-cultural connectedness resulting out of these "one-world" encounters, are shared and retold across the respective networks. To explore this assertion a little further, it is useful to read the story "The Double Eye" (Marcel Thekaekara 2001), the story of the first meeting of Adivasis of the AMS and members of the ATP (see Appendix 8). Here, the crossing of cultural boundaries contributed to a shift in the Adivasis' and Germans' self-perceptions, which translated back into their everyday lives in India and Germany. It is worth bearing in mind that these accounts claim to represent Adivasi perspectives, but are ultimately mediated through non-Adivasi Indian and German lenses.

How did this first encounter between Adivasis and Germans come about? The year is 1991, the place Heidelberg. The "rice group", students of the local autonomous ESG surrounding two medical students, recently returned from a placement at the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital, meet every week to discuss Development issues, to share a bowl of rice, and donate the money saved from the meal directly to the hospital. These signs of solidarity do not go unnoticed in Gudalur, and in 1994 a delegation of non-Adivasi ACCORD staff first visit Germany to talk about the situation of Adivasis in India and Gudalur in particular. It was the impression these personal encounters left that many ATP members today cite as their prime motivation to join the "India Project", as it was called back then. This led them to support ACCORD's idea – in line with their credo of economic self-reliance – for the Adivasis to buy a tea plantation, in order to ensure at least the partial financial security and independence of their Development work in the long-term.

We fast forward to 1998: with the help of an interest-free loan of 20 million Rupees/one million Deutsche Mark (approx. £350,000 at the time) from Charities Advisory Trust in London, the Adivasis acquire the 176-acre Madhuvana (honey forest) estate. The Adivasi Tee Projekt (ATP) is formed to raise funds for repaying this loan.

This is the by now familiar story of how the Adivasis acquired a tea plantation. This story forms the narrative basis through which ATP members are inducted into the organisation and introduced to AMS/ACCORD's work. The full story of "The Double Eye" can be found in Appendix 8, in my translation from German.

The attitudes in "The double eye" were recorded at the end of the 1990s. Since then, the standard of life for Adivasis has changed dramatically in Gudalur, e.g. an entire generation of Adivasi children has grown up without the experience of hunger, in no small measure thanks to the Development interventions introduced by AMS/ACCORD. At the same time, the

activists are, however, painfully aware of being in somewhat of a sorcerer's apprentice-type situation, i.e. of wanting to recall some of the spirits they helped summon. Taking a critical stance in this context, I argue that, thanks to AMS/ACCORD's conversion of the tribal economy to tea production, Adivasis in Gudalur have undergone a process reminiscent of Kerala planters' simultaneous disciplining of the "wild" landscape and its "wild" inhabitants from the 1930s onwards, as described by Kjosavik (2011: 127):

> The 'wild' forest people got trained and disciplined together with the rows and columns of coffee and tea. Even the 'wildest' of them, the *Kattunaicker*, who were nomadic hunters and gatherers, eventually changed their rhythms to the ringing bells of the plantations.

This economic shift engendered the adoption of new lifestyles by the present generation of Adivasi youngsters. The Western lifestyles and material desires eschewed by their parents now come naturally to the present generation of Adivasi school-leavers. As the adoption of Western lifestyles progresses, familiar social problems enter the picture, e.g. that of "time scarcity" – that Adivasis do not have time to meet and talk any more because they are too busy in their tea gardens or going to AMS meetings. There has also been a resurgence in alcoholism and alcoholism-related domestic violence, and consumerist behaviour, despite the fact that the "traditional" Adivasi values endorsed by AMS/ACCORD and mainstreamed into all their projects are supposed to guard against this. As the activists see Adivasi friends slide down the slippery slope of alcoholism and its related health problems, and, in a way, see their life's work destroyed, they (depending on who one talks to) view this either with increasing desperation, or as a never-ending source of motivation to continue the fight against these perceived social evils. It is to these dissonances between activist ideals and ground realities I return to in the chapter "Stories of chai for change?", in my analysis of the problems with activist imaginaries of indigeneity.

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From the transnational sphere I now move on to discussing selected aspects of the Adivasi indigeneity debate in India, in Part II. Since Adivasi lifeworlds span such a wide range of issues, this is naturally a selective account. Subsequently, I introduce the regional Adivasi indigeneity picture in South India, before concentrating on Gudalur, in Part III, and the narratives of Adivasi indigeneity circulating there, in Part IV.

Part II

Adivasi indigeneities in India

"Adivasis have made their way into modernity through social exclusion & negative integration."
Alice Tilche (2011: 23)

In "Some opening thoughts", I introduced the reader to the academic debate and the contemporary politics surrounding the terms "tribe", "Scheduled Tribes", "Adivasi", and "indigenous peoples". As Tilche asserts in the above quote (ibid.), Adivasis have not been able to participate in "modernity" on equal terms. In fact, negative integration means that Adivasis have been used as the anti-modern foil against which the "modern" Indian nation often defines itself.

By way of discussing current media representation of Adivasis and the problems with the notion of Adivasi indigeneity, I now seek to highlight the conflictual currents inherent in the Adivasi indigenism discourse in India.

"Will the real Adivasi please stand up?" Contemporary politics of Adivasi re/presentation

"Of all the things I have learnt about the Adivasis, the most important is that we know very little about them."
G.N. Devy (2006: 5)

"Adivasi" is a category like nation – a colonial invention reappropriated by the formerly colonised. Adivasi activists are actively engaged in reworking cultural stereotypes and historical legacies. Critics, however, argue that the transnational indigenist discourse is singularly unhelpful for the Indian context in general, and Adivasis in particular, because of the complex historical interweaving of resistance and colonial governmentality. Contrary to popular notions, different Adivasi populations are only partly, if at all, and then not all, receding residues of an original "indigenous" subcontinental populace. The connection between aboriginality and authenticity, or the legitimation of authenticity with aboriginality, is thus a priori a spurious one. Activists, however, do not "have it all wrong". Rather, they appropriate popular notions of Adivasi indigenousness, subvert them, and create their own – in the service of their activism for and on behalf of the "Adivasi" peoples they claim to represent and act for. This, again, is not supposed to imply that Adivasis do not have agency, which would be a dangerous fallacy to assume. Rather, one can conceive of it as a continuous interplay of negotiating power relations with more and less powerful actors. This involves, for instance, Adivasis positioning themselves alongside more powerful actors such as NGOs, if

this is to their advantage. This is mostly against oppressive state forces imposing resource governmentality in relation to the forest, the Adivasis' livelihood base (or only supplementation because of violently enforced restricted access to the forest).

There is no doubt that Adivasis have been subjected to a fate similar to that of IP worldwide, i.e. of erroneously being classified along the polarising lines of either "noble" or "barbaric savages". Translated into Indian terms, this signifies either the attitude of Elvin (Singh 1996: 68, Cheria, Bijoy et al. 1997: d) and other likeminded people, who maintain that the "uncorrupted tribals" should be allowed to live in peace and isolation in national parks, or the equally patronising opinion of large parts of Indian society, who hold that Adivasis are in reality "backward Hindus", who have so far carelessly rejected the generous Development packages designed for them and have – incomprehensibly – refused to give up their "primitive" lives in the forest (Campaign for Survival and Dignity 2008).

These kinds of representation practices are especially prevalent in the media, on which I focus in the following section. This I then compare with anthropological representations of Adivasis. Subsequently, I direct the spotlight on the local Adivasi actualities I witnessed during my three fieldwork trips in 2003, 2007, and 2009/10 respectively. Lastly, I concentrate on the specific reality I encountered during the latter of these stays in Gudalur in Tamil Nadu. I do this in order to clarify what constitutes the ethnographic backdrop to this thesis, and what does not.

Adivasi lifeworlds today span a massive array of different life experiences. There are as many different Adivasi realities as there are Adivasi societies in India. Those accounts of Adivasi actualities that we are familiar with in 2014, through mainstream and independent media, activist accounts, and development organisations, for instance, are, very broadly speaking, negatively coloured. As regards these different representations and their different sources and authors, we have to bear in mind that, whichever orientation or provenance, they are never disinterested. As with any general account (that any representation inevitably is), of a multiplicity of different ethnic subcategories lumped into one umbrella term, such as "Adivasi" or "tribal" or "indigenous", the "tribal" actualities that, in one form or another, actually make it into the non-mainstream media (and even the mainstream news from time to time), may aspire to represent the way the majority of tribal peoples today live their lives, within the arbitrarily bounded national unit that is the Indian nation state on the South Asian subcontinent. These accounts, however, apodictically (and again not disinterestedly) fail to represent the entire gamut of tribal lifeworlds in India.

Media representations inevitably distort Adivasi realities to create publicity, outrage, or sympathy. Thus we always view ground actualities through a filter. Particularly prevalent are government, religious, multinational corporate, social and indigenous activist, and anthropological filters. Comparatively rarely do we hear Adivasis speak for themselves, and comparatively often do we hear others (claim to) speak for Adivasis. For the latter Adivasis are, variously, backward, primitive, noble, marginalised, voiceless, wise, etc. That these characterisations mostly say more about the speaker than those spoken about is worth reiterating.

The Adivasi world I talk about in this thesis is different from the media representations of Adivasis currently circulating in the newssphere. Most of these current media reports focus on the civil war-torn areas of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. The tribal world I deal with here is that of South India. As in other parts of India, Adivasis in South India are discriminated against, marginalised, and killed. The difference in South India is that Adivasis represent only about 1% of the population of the states of Tamil Nadu (1.05%) and Kerala (1.14%) respectively, for instance, compared to the “tribal belt” of Middle and North India (in rounded figures both Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh approx. 6%, Chhattisgarh 32%, Odisha 22%, Jharkhand 26%, Madhya Pradesh 20%, Gujarat 15%, Rajasthan 15%, among others) and North-East India (Meghalaya 86%, Manipur 38%, Nagaland 89%, Arunachal Pradesh 65%, to name but a few), according to the 2011 census (Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2014).

Despite this fact, communities have emerged, such as the ones in the Gudalur valley of Tamil Nadu I look at in detail in this work, that have seemingly been able to reverse the process of economic decline, cultural disintegration, and coerced assimilation into the regionally dominant society (in terms of religion, Hindu for most of India and also Christian for South India). Some even appear to have been able to regain a certain amount of territorial, political, socio-economic, and cultural control in their respective regions.

Or have they? May we be buying too readily and gullibly into certain Adivasi “success stories” (Webb 2010) told by gifted Adivasi activist storytellers? It is worth recalling Nietzsche’s (1873) words:

> When someone hides something behind a bush and looks for it again in the same place and finds it there as well, there is not much to praise in such seeking and finding. Yet this is how matters stand regarding seeking and finding "truth" within the realm of reason. If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare "look, a mammal' I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value. That is to say, it is a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth which contains not a single point which would be "true in itself" or really and universally valid apart from man. At bottom, what the investigator of such truths is seeking is only the metamorphosis of the world into man.

It is thus necessary to always cast a critical spotlight on the often very conflicting information about Adivasis, especially information derived from the Internet, the content of which is too easily taken at face value. In particular, the discrepancy in content and flow of information between the ground and the international arena on the net, and the contradictions arising out of differential access to information, are valuable fields of anthropological analysis. The politics behind the (over)simplification of issues, and un/intentional veiling and blurring of the complexities and specificities of ground actualities, has to be a primary concern for anyone studying Adivasis.

Who is allowed to represent Adivasis? Who has the power to represent Adivasis? The difficulty of answering these questions was pointedly illustrated by the discussion surrounding Binayak Sen's decision to turn down the Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award in 2011. Adivasi activists demanded that either Adivasis themselves should be honoured or the award not be given to non-Adivasis "on behalf of Adivasis". One of the problems of awards is that they have their roots in a more individualistic cultural basis, in that they are given to individuals, rather than an entire people numbering over 90 million. This does not gel well with more collectively and communally oriented cultures such as those of Adivasi groups. Two vocal Adivasi voices in this issue were Gladson Dungdung, who asked "Which Adivasi, what India?" in his article (Dungdung 2011), and Gurushan Kisku in "Our fight is for Adivasi identity" (Kisku and Mittal 2010):

To Dr. Binakak Sen Ji & Shree Bulu Imam Ji, Respected citizens of India.
Re: Requesting to protect the culture, identity and dignity of the Adivasis (Indigenous People) of India.
Respected Dr. Sen Ji and Shree Imam ji,
Greetings!

We hope both of you are fine and doing well. We have high respect for both of you, your work and your commitment towards to people of India. However, we came to know from the website (www.gandhifoundation.org) of the London based Gandhi Foundation that the foundation has decided to give the Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award 2011 to the Adivasis (the Indigenous People) of India, which is indeed a welcome step. […]

However, it is extreme painful to know that the foundation will give award to both of you on behalf of the Adivasis of India. Though the award will be given to Adivasis of India but the recipients are not the Adivasis, which directly means there are no capable Adivasis in India to receive the Award. We feel that this is a clear case of insult, humiliation and attack to the dignity of Adivasis of India by an international organization.

This is also a case of how the Adivasis are being neglected even today though there are number of renowned leaders like Mr. Soma Guria, Mrs. Dayamani Barla, Mrs. C.K. Janu, Padamshree Tulsi Munda and so many others, who have won the fights against big corporate giants and also did lots of work for promotion and protection of the Adivasis tradition, culture and livelihoods.

Therefore, we humbly request both of you that you should not receive the Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award 2011. Secondly, if the Gandhi Foundation is willing to award you for your precious contributions to the society than you should ask the Gandhi Foundation to change the title of the award. We repeat that we have high regards for both of you. However, we would not like you to receive the Award on behalf of the Adivasis of India. We believe that you'll do it for the protection of the dignity of the Adivasis of India.

With kind regards

Gladson Dungdung, Sunil Minj, Barkha Lakra, Sushil Barla, Joy Tuddu, Sudeep Tigga and Dayal Kujur, Jharkhand Human Rights Movement, Ranchi (Jharkhand) Jerome G. Kujur, Rakesh Roshan Kiro, Prabha Lakra, Xavier Kujur, Anju Kujur Jharkhand Indigenous Peoples Forum, Ranchi (Jharkhand). (Dungdung and al. 2011)

Binayak Sen's reply on the matter of representation of and/or by Adivasis is illuminating:

However, we have used this profiling to raise issues related to the dysfunctional developmental policies and their effects the lives and concerns of the people of India, which has meant that we have often spoken of the people we know most closely, the toiling people and Adivasis of central India. At no point have we claimed to represent the Adivasis.

The Adivasis are not a homogenous category, except in administrative files, and represent a diversity of histories, cultures and political positions. The question of representation is extremely complicated in any case. We think the central debate in our public polity is about the contending claims of the destructive development being thrust upon us, and the visions and insights of a holistic, indigenous world view. The battle lines are between the greed of the few, and the conviviality of all. We have great regard for the many leaders named in your letter, but seeing the debate entirely in ethnic terms might lead to a tribal leader of the salwa judum claiming to represent the Adivasis purely on grounds of racial purity! (Sen and Sen 2011)

Further sources on Adivasis and media re/presentation can be found in Marcel Thekaekara (1993, 2008a, 2011b), Thekaekara (2008, 2008-09), Kujur (2010), Parkin (2000), and Sharma (2000). Following on from the problems with media representation and awards in connection with Adivasis, I now focus specifically on the problems with the concept of "Adivasi indigeneity".

Adivasi indigeneities and their problems

Conceptual elusiveness and problematicness

The only point that can be asserted with certainty about the category of the indigenous is its disputedness/contestedness. Who is to define who is indigenous is a highly contested issue, not least because of the entitlements attached to the label. States, governments, laws, activists, courts, and IP themselves are all vying for definitional supremacy. Whoever has the power to define who is indigenous ultimately has the last word. Most of the time it is not IP who are able to define who they are in the first instance.

No discussion on indigenous identity can therefore skirt its muddy conceptual waters. Conceptual clarity is elusive. Academic discourse demands it, but ultimately has to concede defeat. Instead it turns towards the analysis of the concept's elusiveness. Which also hints at the impossibility, and maybe even undesirability to define the term (and thus formaldehyde/museumise/index/label the people thus designated). This legitimises the question whether we can work with such a flawed concept.

The emergence of distinct Adivasi indigeneities has necessitated a reappraisal of the IP category, specifically in relation to South Asia, since Adivasis cannot simply be defined by the indigenous peoples bracket. In international indigenous discourse, we still find a pervasiveness of Latin American definitions of IP. We are faced with the problem of applying this definition to IP elsewhere, specifically the difficulty of finding/formulating an Asian, and in particular a South Asian definition of IP.

It has to be born in mind that, in the ethnically and culturally hyperhybridised context of India, Adivasi indigeneity is understood more as the political instrumentalisation of indigeneity, rather than as any real or imagined autochthony, in the plural and syncretic civilisation that India is (cf. Béteille 1998). People have plural and often contradictory identities (Sen 2006) and "because of their materiality things can never be reduced to being only one thing, and therefore, such ideologies remain open to contestation" (Keane 2005: 199). Tilche (2011: 23) observes that "collective mobilisations based on the transnational discourse of indigeneity fail to account for the majority of Adivasis' struggles in India, which are played out in the fissures resulting from national forms of governance".

Even though indigenism tries to reverse perilous colonial and racist history, it often ends up confirming it. Because indigenous movements base their future on specific interpretations of the past, they have to negotiate historical power relations. IP thus often find themselves fighting against their own history. As van Schendel (2011: 28) warns though, this can lead to "worrisome links between [IP' approaches] and an exclusionary 'politics of belonging'", since "the notion of 'indigenous people' is constructed upon an outdated concept of place". Equally, Clifford (2001: 483) warns that "for self-identifying 'indigenous people' there is the 'xenophobic shadow of indigeneity', usually called 'nativism'. Prasad (2003: 2) contends that Adivasi demands become dangerous when they in turn want outsiders expelled. This points to the dangerous tendency of indigenous movements to become extremist, puritanical, and exclusionary of any other identities than indigenous/tribal. "Indigenist" has acquired an unsavoury ring to it:

> One worry has been the fact that today's progressive indigenous movements seem to be tapping into the same discursive repertoires as majoritarian, racist indigenous movements such as the British National Party (Kuper 2003) or Hindutva nationalists (Baviskar 2007). Though it is arguably misleading to equate majoritarian indigenous movements, attempting to assert racist privilege, with movements of dispossessed people trying to 'resist discrimination and achieve progress towards equality' (Kenrick and Lewis 2004a), the culturalist turn that many activists have followed instead of an ineffective or discredited class agenda is not without consequence. (Steur 2011b: 92)

The double saviour complex and oppressive authenticity

The problem with the type of indigeneity discourse informing the work of human rights organisations such as the Society for Threatened Peoples is what I would term the "double saviour complex". An "authentic" indigenous culture (authentic according to the activists' definition of authenticity), "innocent" and "pure", has to be "saved" or "liberated" from exploitation. The tenets of this "genuine" indigenous culture in turn serve as the ideological basis for their conceptualisation of "how to save the rest of the world". This saviour complex is one of "good" people saving other good people from "bad" people. IP represent the morally superior human beings who are "entitled" to "survival" on this planet, by virtue of their planetarily "sustainable" ways of life. They are the ones who have to be "saved" because, according to this logic, they in turn will eventually be the "saviours" of humankind, as expressed in claims by organisations such as Survival that tribal peoples will be the ones most likely to survive future climate crises (Corry 2012). This particular conceptualisation of indigeneity is only rarely questioned by the activists since it is central to their campaigns rhetoric. If at all, then doubt is only voiced in private, but definitely not in public discourse. Critique by outsiders is perceived as a threat to activists' hard-won achievements.

This double saviour complex, however, I argue, neglects more subaltern indigeneities, in favour of marketable, transnationally-friendly indigeneities. As Ghosh (2006: 522) pronounces,

> [s]uch a discourse of transnational indigenousness, gaining its power from primitivism and institutions of the United Nations, seeks out token indigenous persons who are amenable to this project of global modernity and who can also stand in for the indigenous populations concerned.

In Gudalur, Chathi and Bomman were two such token Adivasis, who were in AMS/ACCORD'S transnational development discourse transformed from (in Chathi's case) a (non-disclosed) alcoholic ex-animator, into Adivasi culture heroes and Adivasi activist paragons. This points to what I would term the invention of an indigenous dreamscape. If the stark reality of Adivasi lives on the ground, i.e. the nitty-gritty and muddled politics of Adivasis' everyday lives, does not correspond to the activists' imagined ideal of Adivasi indigeneity, they take refuge in the "safety" of international indigenous imaginaries. In this

way the activists try – understandably unfruitfully – to make tribal reality fit with their Adivasi imaginaries, rather than the other way round. Much of their palpable frustration arising out of this dissonance can be explained by this mismatch between reality and imagination. To draw an analogy with the world of policy, the problem with idealised policy concepts such as free, prior and informed consent (FPP) is a similar one. Often they fall short of the (Western) expectations attached to them because they do not correspond to the lived realities of FPP target populations.

This imagined activist Adivasi ethnicity can turn into a definitional straightjacket, in the sense of Sissons' (2005) oppressive authenticity, situated in the past and future, but not in the present, where actual Adivasi ethnicities are deeply contingent, inventive, and context-dependent. This does not mean that activists do not also acknowledge the latter nature of Adivasi ethnicity – it is their preference for the former which is at odds with the reality of Adivasi lives, and accordingly causes much frustration and tension on the part of the activists. Arguably, as the Development intermediaries and mediators between (foreign and national) funding bodies, and its recipients/beneficiaries and the Adivasis, they are, to a certain extent, bound by the respective Development policy strictures of the day. These are again subject to current Development policy fashions, viz. in AMS/ACCORD's case a tendency to fund projects to develop indigenous self-reliance and -representation. One could argue that the activists' predilection for internationally current, imagined Adivasi identities is to a certain extent determined by international Development preferences on indigeneity, which are in turn heavily influenced by South and North American, and Australian indigeneity conceptions. Naturally, the activists do not officially declare to be operating with a concept of Adivasi indigeneity originating partly in their own interpretation, since this would render their work self-serving and circular. After all, it is their official aspiration to champion "real" Adivasi culture. To a certain extent this also has to do with the activists' desire to shape reality to and with their imagination, rather than the other way round.

One example of oppressive authenticity concerns the issue of material poverty. Steur (2011a: 60f.) attests to the hierarchical exclusiveness of the Adivasi label for Kerala's most vocal political representation, the Adivasi Gothra Mahasaba, "A second reason why the rise of indigenism cannot be taken for granted is that the dominant notion of 'adivasi-ness' is often not something with which the rank and file of the AGMS spontaneously identify." Indeed, "[m]any ordinary Paniyas and Adiyas described poverty rather than their 'adivasi' identity as defining their lives". This throws up the question whether "being adivasi" is inextricably tied to material poverty. Does "becoming" or "remaining" Adivasi presuppose

material poverty? That is, can one still call oneself or be called Adivasi if one is not exploited any more? This question has problematic ramifications for the self-representation of Adivasis.

There is an "awkwardness of fit" between transnational discourses and the specific contexts of "indigenousness" in India (Ghosh 2006: 502, Steur 2011b: 93). This is partly responsible for the friction AMS/ACCORD encounter in their efforts to transcend the divide between those familiar and unfamiliar with transnational indigenous subjectivity in their narrative renderings of Adivasis' lives.

The attraction of indigenous movements to left-wing activists is precisely the promise of a return to the original ideas of the Left. In the process, however, we should not ignore that, like other movements championed by the Left, indigenous and indigenist movements harbour elements of differential value. We should not be afraid to point out the less wholesome elements, and should not let our idealism and belief and hope in these movements to fulfil our ideals, prevent us from rigorous analysis and constructive critique.

Later in this chapter, I introduce the dominant indigeneity narratives AMS/ACCORD avail themselves of. In the next chapter, "Stories of chai for change?", I then analyse these narratives for the objectionable elements they may harbour that are criticised by the "dark side of indigeneity" scholars such as Alpa Shah, Crispin Bates, and Luisa Steur. Before travelling to Gudalur, I now give a brief overview of regional Adivasi indigenism in South India.

Adivasi indigenism in South India

Fieldwork diary, 06/09/2009, Pondicherry

Thanuja Mummidi, Assistant Professor in Anthropology at Pondicherry University and former RAI Fellow at Durham University, commented on the "insane" number of movements, federations, and campaigns in Tamil Nadu, all claiming to represent the highest number of Adivasis in the State, utilising the Adivasi label to ally people from different communities under one umbrella term.
There are different kinds of interventions – all with different aims, agendas, sources of funding, actors, target groups (women, elderly, anaemic, you name it). Of these groups those most localised, with a well-defined target group, stable source of funding, and wherein the people targeted have the largest say and ownership, and the implementing NGO the greatest backing in the target population, seem to me the most sustainable ones.
Even though AMS/ACCORD themselves initially started out as an NGO, I am beginning to understand their misgivings about joining in the melée of NGOs and other civil society organisations scrambling to represent Adivasis on a state-wide level. Thanuja also emphasised the difference between scheduled and non-scheduled states in terms of NGOs presence and influence. In scheduled states, the state-led tribal welfare department effectively replaces NGOs in the tribal development sector.
The problem in encouraging Adivasis to set up their own organisations is that people go wherever the funding is. For instance, Viennie (of the Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation) told

me that when TRED (the backing NGO) wraps up in 2010, people will turn to other organisations.

In August 2009 I attended a political rally organised by what was then the South Indian Adivasi Federation (SIAF), a movement backed and funded by several NGOs from the four states of South India, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. In a fieldnote I expressed my impressions thus:

Fieldwork diary, 09/08/2009, World Indigenous Peoples Day rally, Coimbatore

If I thought yesterday had already been amazing, today topped everything I have ever experienced in India. Seeing Adivasi peoples from all four corners of the South unite to demand their rights, merrily dance, sing, perform, banter, and show off their tribal attire, musical instruments, and skills, was simply awe-inspiring. The excitement and anticipation the night before was visibly tangible, people hastening to and fro, happily reunited friends hugging, people laughing, joking, and playing instruments they brought along.
We reached the men's accommodation at St. Joseph ITI shortly before 10am. Most of the groups had already left for the rally's gathering point. Some were still facing transport issues, hence had to wait, so we had a bit of time. Mohan, the Kota gentleman in his dazzling, red-rimmed white dhoti showed me the different musical instruments. The sound of the two tudi drums together, one with full body, one disk-shaped, about 10 cm wide and 40 cm in diameter, the latter being played with two sticks, one thick, one thin, was genuinely spine-tingling. The sound of the massive horn with the long throat was reminiscent of an Alpine horn reverberating from mountain slopes, and the sound of the flute-shaped instruments was like that of a clarinet, but much more piercing. They all sent shivers down my spine.
Getting to the venue was the most exciting part. We all climbed onto a lorry, Fr. Stephen was suddenly behind me, saying how this must be a new experience for me. Sneh of Keystone was also there, but did not appear too keen to talk to me at length (I do not know whether I am imagining things, but the kind of reservations activists have against researchers are sometimes quite palpable). Ramachandra (also of Keystone), on the other hand, was extremely forthcoming, translating and explaining the banners and posters people were holding up. The rascals from yesterday led by Pasha (he is the don, the wannabe teenage big shot with his ultra-cool sunglasses and movie-isms) also boisterously joined in the march. At one point someone was distributing green sweat-towels everyone immediately donned as bandanas, some covering their mouths and noses as well. At the end of the march everyone congregated under a massive awning erected on a dust field inside a compound, with people selling their wares under canopies at the back, massive speakers on either side of the awning, an elevated stage at the front with a couple of tables blessed with broken coconuts. Seated there were the speakers and dignitaries such as Balan, and an anthropologist working for the Anthropological Survey of India.
There were Adivasi ladies wearing vividly coloured and bespangled dresses, and veils inset with mirrors. Toda ladies had their hair in elaborate twisted braids and wore the classic black, white and red patterned dresses and shawls. There were a myriad other tribal costumes, such as the Andhra community's straw and cowrie shell skirts and fake elongated tongues. Most impressive was people's stamina, sitting through speech after speech, in the sweltering heat almost unbearable after the Nilgiri cool. Equally spectacular were the dances and performances. One was by a community from Kerala, clad in stunning red and black outfits,

the women with unusually open flowing hair, and proud and defiant expressions on their faces, wielding tufts of grass that they were flourishing back and forth in striking movements to the trance-inducing music of two tudi players. As time went on, the dance became more and more elaborate with the dancers cross-hopping over sticks held by the other dancers that were horizontally placed to and almost half as long as the stage. At the end the dancers dramatically collapsed on top of each other in frighteningly real exhaustion – not merely part of the show – and were immediately revived with water poured onto them. Some were physically carried away.
One thing I cannot express often enough is my admiration for the TN hosts and organisers, orchestrating the transport and accommodation logistics (people from Keystone, for instance, turning up in far greater numbers than announced, three bus loads in fact coming down from Kotagiri), organising food for 2000 people, turning the initial pandemonium into a more or less smooth operation, in true Indian fashion. Apart from the dance and music troupes, men and women were walking in single-file on opposite sides of the road. The entire march was flanked by policewomen on the women's side, and policemen on the men's side. I took the liberty of flitting in and out of rank, to film people from the front and the side. Unfortunately, the camera battery gave up its ghost just when we got to the rally ground. The joys and frustrations of fieldwork…

Focusing on Tamil Nadu for this discussion of Adivasi indigenism in South India, the state reflects what Steur shows for Kerala, that "there is no consensus on what indigenism is about" (Steur 2011b: 92), especially since both states are so fragmented by NGOs of every conceivable hue claiming to represent tribals. In this context, Prasad (2003: 100) launches a scathing critique against this kind of communalisation of the service sector. She is highly critical of the fact that all these different groups active in tribal "welfare" mostly pursue their own interests, choosing to ignore the exploitative relationships of the wider political economy that lead to tribal deprivation. She decries the lack of progressive political forces in tribal areas and the fragmented nature of radical anti-liberalisation movements (Prasad 2003: 102).

Adivasi indigeneity in the Nilgiris

To analyse how AMS/ACCORD are influenced by the exposure to international IP rights discourses, on the one hand, and national Adivasi discourses, on the other, one needs to scrutinise indigeneity for the local Gudalur context. For the Nilgiris, despite emphatic asseverations to the contrary from different quarters, the notion and claim of indigeneity by any group is logically inconsistent, given the history of people's movements in the region. Historically, it does not make sense to draw a line in time to determine who are the "first" people of the area, no matter how politically desirable such an arbitrary determination of ab-originality may be. In fact, as Steur (2011a: 62) shows for neighbouring Wayanad, "[c]oncepts it employs, such as 'ancestral land', 'tribal way of life', and even the notion of the 'adivasi', are understood rhetorically, or politically, and make little sense as strict references

to local realities." What AMS/ACCORD have done instead for Gudalur Adivasis is to create a new "creation myth" (beginning with the land demonstration story), including an elaborate timeline (ActionAid and AMS/ACCORD 2011e), which is then employed in such diverse contexts as the Vidyodaya school materials, ActionAid UK geography teaching materials, tribal youth camps, and the Culture Centre.

The question is why AMS/ACCORD chose the indigenous Adivasi label over other available political rallying identities. This has to be analysed against the backdrop of other similar Adivasi movements in the region, since the area forms an ethnic unit regardless of the dividing administrative boundaries of three states, and similar forms of land deprivation and economic exploitation affect its tribal populations. As Steur (2011a: 60) asks for the Adivasi Gothra Mahasaba in neighbouring Wayanad in Kerala,

> [t]here was a lot of debate, consequently, on what had caused the rise of the AGMS. The general consensus seems to have become that it was the threat of neoliberalism intensifying an age-old struggle of adivasis against their dispossession. A closer examination, however, upsets this idea of simple historical continuity and forces us to confront the question of why adivasis have started to mobilize according to an ideology of adivasi belonging rather than along the most obvious leftist alternative for them, namely Communism.

AMS/ACCORD thus have to be seen as emerging from within the wider framework of identity-based movements appearing from the 1980s onward. Steur (2011a: 74) again writes,

> [i]f we go beyond the idea that contemporary adivasi resistance is simply the logical historical continuation of an age-old struggle against colonial oppression and are instead sensitive to the broader transformative vision and reworking of stereotypical notions of 'adivasiness' that are proposed by movements such as the AGMS, the question becomes pertinent why this shift from a discursive emphasis on 'class' to the assertion of 'identity' took place.

The shift from class to identity does not come about without its problems, however. "Identity", by default, as a boundary-staking category and process, is contested and contradictory. As Steur (2011a: 61) testifies for Kerala, the contradictions there are similar to the ones characterising the patchwork indigeneity picture in Gudalur:

> The notion of indigeneity claimed by the AGMS even if interpreted in this sense is not logically consistent. It does not include the Chettys, a group considered indigenous to Wayanad, who used to employ many Paniya on their land but are not considered 'adivasi'".

The picture of indigenist currents in South India that presents itself to us is thus one riven by internal tensions and conflicts, and marked by inconsistencies and contradictions, mirroring the conceptual problems with the idea of indigenism. As I demonstrate in the following section on TAF, for instance, personal animosities coupled with and extrapolated to the level of inter-tribal rivalries, prevented the development of a unified South Indian Adivasi movement. As mentioned, previous to the PhD fieldwork with AMS/ACCORD in 2009/10, I was in contact with different other Adivasi organisations during my 2003 and 2007 fieldwork,

and maintained these contacts during 2009/10. These were the Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation (TAF), and Coorg Organisation for Rural Development (CORD) and their movement offshoot National Adivasi Alliance (CORD/NAA) based in Karnataka. It is to the narratives of these two that I now briefly turn.

Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation (TAF)

Fieldwork diary, 17/08/2009

Viennie's endeavour is to be, in his own words, just a "zero" in TAF (despite being the coordinator); in other words, to be a simple worker in the service of TAF. But according to him, the media will always look for the backstage NGOs in an Adivasi movement. Adivasis are still not considered capable of initiating and maintaining their own organisations and taking their own decisions.
One of the principal aims of TAF is to obtain Scheduled Tribes (ST) certificates. The problem, however, is that, ultimately, the government decides the identity of a tribal group. According to Viennie, TAF's convenor, many bribe officials to obtain ST certificates, as has happened, according to him, for instance, in Rajasthan, in connection with the Gujjar.
TAF's also aims is to train para-legal workers from every district on issues such as human rights, contracting lawyers, registering cases with the police, legal aid, etc. The problem with this month's training was that only eight out of 30 supposed trainees turned up, hence it had to be cancelled, wasting 3000 Rupees.
The following notes are Viennie's views on what is going on in the greater Adivasi movements arena and, most importantly, behind the scenes of some of these movements:
We started out with his description of TAF's monthly meeting on Sunday, which was very tiring, but in a way also good because at least things are happening, although not always in a straightforward manner. Leaders such as Sundaram and Irulapu have their own vested interests, with Mageshwari and Vasanthi representing the strong women's front.
Two of the things they took issue with were the fact that the entire leadership of TAF was in the hands of men and in the hands of Irular. Balan, Sundaram and Irulapu were initially elected for three years, but it seems they will not last this long with Mageshwari and Vasanthi conspiring on the phone to each other and members after the meeting to depose of the latter two, Nos 2 and 3 in TAF, at next month's meeting. B, S and I walked out of the meeting after the two women started shouting, Viennie and Vincent had to follow straight, otherwise they would be accused by one side of siding with the other. What the others did in their absence was to elect a vice-secretary and vice-person to the No 3, who were not Mageshwari and Vasanthi though because they are hoping to bag the real Nos 2 and 3 posts at next month's meeting since S and I are going to or will have to resign. The two vices are again Irular, however, if these two women will be elected into Nos. 2 and 3 – Mageshwari is a Kattunaickan – at least another community will be represented. So they are trying for both the ethnic diversification of the leadership and advancement of women. Vasanthi was the one who received 24,000 votes running for a supposedly Adivasi issues friendly party in Kuddalur (pronounced Kaddalur) constituency that, however, also campaigns for the rights of groups seeking ST status who in fact are not Adivasis, hence she fell out of favour with the TAF base for this political move.
Viennie's assessment of the success of the rally was equally mixed. The main problems were water and transport, and people bringing extra people on very short notice (Keystone). Tony, the initiator, was not really helpful on the day, just "floating around", wholly immersing himself in the spirit of the event. The formation of SIAF did not happen in the end. The

Kerala people wanted to take to the stage and talk, but there was no time and they were not allowed to any more after the reading of the resolutions concluded the event at 5pm. Mageshwari was a good MC. The problem with the word resolution is that it should have been *korikai* – demands instead. This was a printing mistake on the resolution sheet. It also gave the wrong telephone number and Irulapoo wanted to see his name bigger on it – he seems to be a bit of a megalomaniac. There were only 200 chairs for 1500 people. The venue was supposed to provide all these facilities, but did not. The resolutions were the familiar ones, like scheduling for TN, the implementation of the FRA, etc. V does not think anything will come of them because they are too high-flying, but nevertheless people have to continue demanding them. I asked whether any govt. officials came to the rally since the district collector and police superintendent were supposed to come, but they did not because of some other engagement in Karnataka. The media presence and coverage was quite satisfactory and the Adivasis' demands were quite well-represented according to V. The total costs of the rally were Rs. 290,000, covered by 1 lakh from Mani Tese (an Italian organisation) funding, 130,000 from another source, and 15,000 each from every of the four South Indian member states.

An interesting side fact regarding ethnic diversification is that the Malayalis in Namakkal District, the majority community among STs (the next-largest group are the plains Irular, which can be found in ten districts), are not represented in TAF because they would otherwise outweigh the other communities and take over the leadership by sheer force of numbers.

Communities that have not been accorded ST status in TN yet, but are Adivasis are the Pulaiyar and Lambadis (who are STs in Karnataka though).

Balan is also the president of the Adivasi Solidarity Council, which, however, does not have any money for meetings at present.

The Tribal Research Centre in Ooty post previously held by Jakka Parthasarathy (author or co-author of books on different tribal communities in the Nilgiris in Keystone office) may now go to Dr. Sumati of Anna Uni, Chennai, the government anthropologist working inter alia for the Anthropological Survey of India responsible for determining the "character of Adivasis" and consequently the communities eligible for community (ST) certificates. Hence she was very interesting for Mageshwari and Vasanthi who wanted her to talk at the convention, however, Tony did not want to pay Rs. 7,000 for her flight from Chennai to Coimbatore. Mageshwari and Vasanthi insisted, so paid 2,000 each themselves, acquired another 2,000 from someone else, and 1,000 from the Mani Tese funding.

On the Thekaekara family V commented that they are Kerala people, hence people from outside. V seemed to find it slightly puzzling that Tarsh was railing against settlers from Kerala displacing Adivasi peoples if they themselves are from Kerala. According to V "ACCORD does not have any accord with other organisations".

The gist of the evening's conversation was that vested interests play a great role, that it is about having the right connections, and that people go with who has and wherever the money is. When the funding for TAF from TRED via Mani Tese runs out in 2010, there is the danger of TAF and its principal members being hijacked by some other NGOs who will take the accolade for setting up TAF and for its work. People turn to the big man, Krishnan of VRDP – Village Reconstruction and Development Programme celebrating its 25th year at the cultural festival in Salem on 8th August. VRDP is the organisation involved with TAAK and is also part of ADI. Viennie has seen enough of him and the power struggles. Power corrupts. There is value in having a moderate and modest leader who is a good communicator and can unite people. Unity, community, charisma, clout, power, influence are the buzzwords. For me as a researcher it boils down to the choice of either staying away from all the politics or joining the fray.

Fieldwork diary, 14/09/2009, TAF meeting, Trichy

Some of the issues discussed at the TAF meeting were their wish for more and better representation at the state-level that led them to set up TAF, in Balan's words, and bogus/phony leaders and the way they claim to speak on Adivasis' behalf. This especially pertains to Krishnan, who seems to be their enemy No. 1 because he suppresses Adivasi leadership in the organisation. Viennie seems to have a personal issue with him because he said he (V) was pushed out of the Adivasi Solidarity Council. I wonder whether Krishnan talks about Viennie in the same way and what the real issues are. I also do wonder what Viennie's own intentions are in helping me so much with my research.
There were no TAF leadership issues this time and none of the expected backbiting between the ladies and the two dominant gents. Irulapu was more indifferent, in Viennie's words. He was the one who sabotaged the legal training last month where only a fraction of 30 turned up. It seems Viennie and Vincent (the two non-Adivasi TRED representatives) would like to get rid of him because he is counterproductive to the organisation's interests, but the two categorically stated that they do not have a say in who is elected and voted out, that they are only observers, etc. Still, at the meeting I had the feeling some of the Adivasis present were seeking the two's approval. An interesting side fact is that Sundaram and Irulapu were not originally envisaged to become Nos. 2 and 3 in the organisation, but then someone talked to the members and they were elected with a majority.
There was a discussion about the name Adivasi – Sundaram tried to defend his point that he was first and foremost a Tamilian Irular and not an Adivasi Irular – highly interesting he should attach his tribal identity to the ethnic state identity rather than the national Adivasi identity. Viennie's interpretation was that this was because he lives in the plains where Tamil identity is more pronounced, whereas hills people had always had their separate (tribal) identities. Again in Viennie's words one of TAF's aims was to bridge the gap between hills and plains Adivasis and to reawaken/revitalise the plains tribals' Adivasi identity, presuming that they had in the course of their "plainisation" lost their tribal identity. However, I am not sure whether they might not have had a separate identity all along and that TAF's effort was again imposing something along the lines of creating an imagined community of Adivasis along the lines of Jharkhandi identity, or to put it the other way round, whether they ever had a shared identity. For this I need to find out the plains Adivasis' histories, where they originated or mythically place themselves and whether a loss of their tribal culture/identity took place as a result of their moving/being pushed into the plains and coming in closer contact than otherwise with mainstream culture, or whether they lived in the plains all along, which is why, for instance, the plains and hills Irulars only share a common name, but otherwise have nothing else in common.
Rajangam and Maheswari/TENT in Madurai are from the Kattunaickan community that are nomadic. I had a really invigorating and interesting talk with him in the midday sun, about nomadism, how the government does not recognise nomadic people as a separate people, their demand for a separate government commission/department dealing with nomadic people, how in tribal development it was always the hill tribals who were being favoured by the government, how the nomadic communities are always wrongfully charged for crimes they did not commit by the police, how many people in India are in fact nomadic. He kept mentioning links to Roma and Sinti in Europe and his links to the Vatican as a devout converted-Christian because fathers had helped them out financially when their son had to have heart surgery to close a hole in his heart. There was a World Congress of Nomadic Peoples in Budapest. I told him of my work for the Society for Threatened Peoples and the recorded cases of discrimination against Roma in Slovakia, Italy, France, and Kosovo, and gypsies in the UK and Ireland, to name only a few.

In contrast to TAF, Karnataka-based CORD/National Adivasi Alliance (NAA) follows a much more populist strategy of mobilising people, for instance by producing a popular music video on Adivasi struggles in India entitled "Gaon chhodab nahin – We will not leave our lands!"[13] (Sasi 2009).

*

Having filled in the Adivasi indigeneity canvas transnationally, in India, and South India, I now arrive in the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu, for Part III. The place in question is Gudalur – like its etymological roots, a crossroads and confluence of many different Adivasi indigeneity narratives, told and spread by a group of talented storytelling social activists. These narratives I then discuss in detail in Part IV.

Part III

Adivasi indigeneities in Gudalur and beyond

In the preceding two parts I traced the connections between Adivasi and global indigeneities, and resulting cosmopolitan Adivasi identities, and the emergence of distinct Adivasi indigeneities in India, and regional South Indian indigeneities in particular. I now travel to one such "meeting place" of local, regional, national, and global indigeneities in South India, AMS/ACCORD in Gudalur.

Before turning to the AMS/ACCORD tribal sphere, it is worth taking a look at the specificities of the Gudalur region as being a border region, at the juncture of three states, and therefore exposed to multiple political and cultural influences. This in turn has ramifications for Adivasi representation, both politically and ideologically. The Gudalur valley/taluk of the Nilgiris presents a politically ambivalent case, since – administratively – it has alternately belonged to the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. This is reflected in the everyday use of languages(s) – while Tamil is the official, state-imposed language, Malayalam is on a par with it in importance, followed by Kannada and the various tribal languages. Within Tamil, the resettling of Sri Lankan refugees to the district since the 1970s has further stratified the language. Religiously, Gudalur presents a highly heterogenous and – given the interreligious conflict in other parts of India – relatively peaceful picture, with worshippers practicing in adjacent mosques, churches and Hindu temples in the main town of Gudalur.

[13] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M5aeMpzOLU

In indigenous terms, the Nilgiris is relatively isolated from other Adivasi groups in Tamil Nadu, both ethnically and politically, and I have heard Tamil Adivasi activists not from the Nilgiris lament the fact that Nilgiris Adivasis are difficult to engage with and have very different concerns from Adivasis living in the plains, for instance. As exhibited by the efforts led by TAF, described above, it is therefore a challenge to set up a pan-Tamil Nadu, or even pan-South Indian Adivasi movement that could legitimately represent a majority of the Adivasi population. This is also complicated by issues of tribal recognition and differential access to resources mediated by NGOs. Partly because of AMS/ACCORD's powerful influence in the valley, and its proximity to Kerala, Gudalur thus exhibits more inter-indigenous links with related tribal groups in neighbouring Keralan districts, than with Adivasis in Tamil Nadu's districts to the East. Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (2003) propose engaging with specific "regional modernities" when critiquing Development and post-Development scenarios in India. For Gudalur, it is worth bearing in mind the specific regional *indigenous* modernities unique to Gudalur, when engaging with its tribal ethnoscape. Two aspects of such regional indigenous modernities I now discuss, narrativity and culture.

In the first part of this sub-chapter on Gudalur I look at the connection between tribal sociality, narrativity, and patronage in the Nilgiris. This forms the backdrop of AMS/ACCORD's narratives on tribal culture, of which the one of cultural erosion is the most prominent. I then localise the role "culture" plays within AMS/ACCORD, and illustrate this with two case studies, on the revival of *kaavus* (sacred groves) and the Culture Centre, respectively.

Given the diversity of AMS/ACCORD's activities, it is worth bearing in mind that "Gudalur" signifies as many different things to different people as there are people involved with AMS/ACCORD, locally and globally. This may be an innovative tribal-led health programme in an remote area to Bangalore-based medical professionals; political and legal representation to a Kattunayakan family driven off the land they had built their huts on by a plantation owner; an exciting project placement "in the jungle" to an overseas student on a Development course; an employment opportunity to a Mullukurumba accountant, Paniya teacher or Kattunayakan tea picker; a source of inspiration and a vision of a different economy to overseas social investors on a "journey of change"; an education opportunity for their children to Bettakurumba parents, in a school where tribal cultures are respected (as opposed to government schools); or a collaborative research opportunity for anthropologists such as myself.

Since culture figures so large in AMS/ACCORD's Adivasi Development philosophy, I have opted to treat it separately here in this chapter on Adivasi indigeneities, instead of including it in the sub-chapter "The AMS/ACCORD family - "Development on their own terms". At first I therefore provide a sketch of AMS/ACCORD's cultural activities, followed by an account of my engagement in the establishment of the "Culture Centre" or "First Peoples Place". Finally, I turn to some of the dominant Adivasi indigeneity narratives in Gudalur. By tracing some of the places and people the Adivasis of AMS/ACCORD are connected to, such as ActionAid UK, JCUK, and the Adivasi Tee Projekt (ATP) in Germany, I demonstrate how indigeneity is continuously reinvented and reinforced through a process of reflexive narrative feedback by the actors in these networks. I ask how Gudalur is connected to its international activist networks in the UK and Germany, and how the latter are (not) connected amongst each other, and why (not). I also highlight some of the opportunities and problems that arise out of these intercultural encounters. To trace these connections, I once again avail myself of some the dominant stories that travel along and are traded as artefacts among and within these networks. Lastly, I explore some of the Gudalur activist notions of Adivasi indigeneity and what the problems with them may be. This discussion segues into the following chapter "Stories of chai for change?".

In this sub-chapter, I deal with the introduction of the Adivasi/indigeneity, community, and cultural unity narratives by social activists in Gudalur; the localisation of indigeneity in an ethnically heterogenous tribal region; the role of storytelling in activist rhetoric (Gorringe 2010, Webb 2010) and the functions it fulfils for both mobiliser and mobilised; the moulding of indigeneity narratives for tribal mobilisation and development; and the idea of cultural justice (in addition to social justice discussed in "Stories of self-reliance"). I also look at the use of cultural revival processes for "reclaiming culture" (such as the revival of *kaavus*, sacred groves), and the cultivation of cultural assertiveness (such as in the Teacher Trainee Programme) to fight cultural imperialism, the goal of which is the consolidation of indigenous cultural resilience. In particular, I examine how AMS/ACCORD try to instil cultural resilience in Adivasi youth through storytelling. Futhermore, I explore the fissures, discontinuities, and the disjunctures between "Development" and the continuity of Adivasi cultures. Finally, I investigate issues of control of the re/presentation of Adivasi indigeneities and issues of cultural authenticity – specifically to what extent, and in which contexts, indigeneity has to be performed in order be to "authentic". This bears challenges for adapting Adivasi narratives for non-Adivasi, and international audiences in particular.

Before concentrating on the AMS/ACCORD activist narrativisation of tribal indigeneity, I situate the latter in the wider landscape of tribal narrativity in the Nilgiris.

The connection between tribal sociality, narrativity, and patronage in the Nilgiris

Allegiance to a movement/organisation is constantly tested and negotiated. From a tribal perspective there is no dearth of NGOs to join in the region. Accordingly, the Gudalur tribals' support of AMS/ACCORD is not a given, contrary to AMS/ACCORD's propaganda. The fact that AMS/ACCORD's membership has consistently grown since its inception in the 1980s, cautiously speaks of its popularity. Nevertheless, this does not prevent entire tribes, such as the Irular of that region (not to be confused with the Irular of the plains), to change allegiance or to form splinter organisations. I thus ask what it is that draws Adivasis to join the AMS?

Ulrich Demmer (2008) defines tribality in the Nilgiris "as a specific configuration of moral and socio-cultural knowledge [that] is articulated in narratives, songs (cf. Demmer 1996) and ritual performances". He goes on to characterise tribal lifeworlds in the Nilgiris as riven by deep tensions between Adivasi conceptions of what it means to be tribal, and different cultures of modernity clashing in the region. According to him it is through the enactment of rituality that Adivasis try to counteract these tensions. These rituals on what constitute a good and a bad life also serve as a social corrective. For Demmer, sociality in indigenous terms conceives of a moral community as a tradition of engaged argumentation:

> Almost all Adivasi concepts of what a good life is or should be like stand in tense relationship with the culture of modernity as it is imagined by the state and the ruling party. […] Instead, we observe the negotiation and construction of a specific form of local modernity or, more accurately, the making of a plurality of local modernities, each striving to gain hegemony with respect to what counts as the best or the most preferable vision of a good life. […] Two kinds of modernity can be seen to be competing with each other – Western and Tamil. Adivasis respond with creative appropriation, criticism, and even cultural resistance to articulate the "tribal view" and produce a culturally specific subaltern consciousness. Its communitarian worldview and the imagination of the sociality as a moral community provide a counterpoint to both of these modernities. […] [T]hese performances re-ground, justify and thus defend local identity and the Adivasi commitment to their own values and concepts against the claims of the modernities of the states. (Demmer 2008)

It is perhaps the gap then, as perceived by Adivasis, between "the tribal view" and several competing modernities in the Nilgiris, that organisations such as AMS/ACCORD and Keystone appear to be able to bridge – chiefly with the help of their financial and political clout, and concomitant extension of patronage to Adivasis. Sachs (2012b) notes that "[t]he emotional impact of these movements in the U.S. [the Occupy and the Tea Party movement] came from the fact that they offered a modernisation of the myth of the American dream that fills an unbearable gap." The question arises whether it is this "myth gap" that AMS/ACCORD appear to be able to fill more "successfully" than others. I argue that

AMS/ACCORD's revitalisation of the different tribal communities' own narratives, and their rebranding of tribals as Adivasis, and Adivasis as IP, represents an attempt at refilling Adivasis' myth gaps and thus a redefinition of their cultural ethos. Conversely, the identification of a myth gap, i.e. the activists' establishment of a need for a revamp of Adivasi cultures, is in itself a myth though. The "myth of the myth gap" in turn has to be legitimised with a further "myth" – that of cultural "erosion".

On cultural erosion

"It is as part of this post-liberalisation valorization of culture that the Adivasi is reclaimed by the national mainstream as primarily a cultural element, in need of preservation and promotion".
Prathama Banerjee (2009)

Idioms of the progressive and inexorable erosion of tribal cultures (and the attendant need to "save" them) are rife in the Nilgiris:

Fieldwork diary, 04/08/2009, Kotagiri

On to Banagudi village and Malingasami temple (with Selvi, a remarkable Alu Kurumba lady, accompanied by Raman in the village) – a joint Badaga and Kurumba temple, where Gumbadeva is worshipped annually in April with an offering of a black goat, with 25 coins, and cannerium smoke. The cult/worshipping, however, has suffered a decline due to a lack of elders to do the poojas, and the knowledge not being passed on to the younger generation because they go for daily wage work, hence do not have time. The activists lament the general lack of care for cultural practices. Thus there is also a lack of control who can enter the temple – outsiders and women used to not be allowed in the temple area during the worshipping of Gumbadeva and strict purification rules would be adhered to, but today anyone can enter.

In relation to AMS/ACCORD, Mari and Stan state:

[T]he current analysis makes us realise that we have to bring in two new dimensions into our work of organising our people. In the past our focus was organising ourselves to face external threats from other vested interests in society. Today while these threats still remain - they are less obvious. The biggest threat we are faced with is the disintegration of our cultural fabric - *so while we may have the AMS as a representative organisation of our community - our very sense of community is in danger of being eroded. We are acutely aware of the threat to the culture and identity of the Adivasi. Our work to-date has focussed on training young people in research and documentation and through them to document the history and different cultural expressions of the community. Today we are talking of establishing a dialogue between the traditional elders and the young people to rediscover what is of relevance, importance and meaning within the Adivasi culture and that will need to be carried forward in our quest for development. We also see this intervention as providing a lot of material to develop a curriculum that is relevant to the Adivasi.* (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2000a, my emphasis)

Other AMS/ACCORD staff though are less hopeful regarding the viability of tribal cultures:

Fieldwork diary, 21/05/2010, Gudalur

I once again realised the influence of the appearance of competence of the ethnographer on the quality of the data s/he collects. I always seem to find out more when other people come to visit, such as today when three well-appointed girls from the U.S., two of them Indian-looking, came to visit. Mahesh is AMS/ACCORD's ayurvedic doctor from near Karjat in Maharashtra. His parents have worked with tribals all their life, i.e. he grew up with them. However, according to him they have lost their culture. Mahesh was impressed enough with the girls to give them a fantastic talk about the FRA, how the land went to the FD and non-tribals, eco-development committees, how people also get the right to decide about tourism, how tribals take tourists into the forest for Rs. 1,000 in Periyar. Some money from Project Tiger is going towards training tribals as anti-poaching watchers. Mahesh personally does not think tribal cultures will survive in 50 years' time. As an example he cited a recent Mullukurumba wedding he went to where people were not wearing their traditional dress any more. Their ethos, however, will survive. I then suggested that the emphasis in tribal cultures may shift from external to internal (ideas, beliefs) manifestations. He also thinks geographical isolation is a significant factor for the retention of peculiar cultural characteristics, e.g. regarding the discussion surrounding the move of tribal villages out of the core Mudumalai zone he thinks they will lose their culture. Mahesh protested when I said Adivasi was a term coined in the 1930s by Christian missionaries in Jharkhand. There was a dominance of the idiom of loss and cultural erosion in Mahesh's words: "There is no space for Adivasis." According to him they will sooner or later be swallowed up by the surrounding societies.

It is against this backdrop of the impending and forecast disappearance of "authentic" Adivasi cultures in the Nilgiris that AMS/ACCORD and other organisations in the region, such as Keystone, are frantically engaged in the documentation and revitalisation of tribal "culture".

AMS/ACCORD and culture

How do I understand "culture" in this context? After Stuart Hall, I conceptualise "culture as both a theoretical category and a political practice", and as a "critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled" (Procter 2004: 2). With this conceptualisation of culture in mind, I now turn to its practical application as a conceptual tool, for my analysis of the problematic "performance" of Adivasi ethnicity in Gudalur, mainly in the context of the "cultural" activities that form part of the CC, and what is generically referred to as "culture" by the activists, usually as part of a series of components of their development work (alongside education, health, finance, etc.).

Significantly, the activists never tired of emphasising the primacy of "culture" in their development activities. At any opportunity, they would underscore the anteriority of culture,

as cultivated in the annual tribal festivals, to any of the subsequent developments, such as the hospital, the school, the setting up of the political arm of the organisation in the form of the federated AMS (nominally even though practically hardly) independent of the NGO ACCORD, the tea cooperative, the savings schemes, the Adivasi Bank, JC, etc.

Culture was thus conceptualised by the activists as both the prerequisite and end of their activities; the lack of culture was perceived as disabling, and the presence of culture enabled the kind of "development" they wanted "their" Adivasis to be able to experience. In their estimation, it was therefore culture, above anything else, that enabled or disabled the realisation of their ideology, and concomitant strategy and implementation of "development on their own terms" for Adivasis. According to the activists' way of thinking, culture was the implementing agent for the kind of (w)holistic development they envisaged for Adivasis, which was in turn supposed to ensure the continuation and flourishing of tribal cultures. Culture was thus both the desired process and the end product of their development efforts.

AMS/ACCORD activists liked to emphasise how "culture" (to be understood as part of a list of development issues that included "land rights", "health", "education", "economic self-reliance", etc.) had been at the top of their Development agenda right from the beginning of their work in the mid-1980s. This concern with culture preceded even the land rights campaign, and the establishment of the hospital and the school, since, in their analysis of the Gudalur Adivasis' predicament, the intactness and vitality of tribal cultures was understood to be the key to improving their communal self-esteem. This, in turn, was vital for realising the (Adivasi and non-Adivasi) activists' vision of "development on their own terms" of the oppressed ("downtrodden" in general Indian NGO parlance) and marginalised ("alienated") Adivasis of the Gudalur area. In part, I argue, AMS/ACCORD created the story of the Adivasi requiring help to be able to "enter the mainstream on their own terms" in order to justify their Development intervention. Simultaneously, they have always had to mitigate the "side-effects" of "development" through cultural mobilisation. While the two should in theory work in tandem, the accompanying rhetoric has over the years turned more into the latter offsetting the former.

Three key narrative steps were part of the activists' early culture efforts: the introduction of the indigeneity, cultural unity, and community narratives. Two of them, indigeneity and community, are supposedly primordial tribal traits. Before elaborating each of these three narratives, it is worth mentioning that my interpretation of their "introduction" by the activists, or accordance of more importance than previously by the tribes themselves, is not shared by the activists. Instead, they would argue that these are attributes inherent to tribal

cultures, and that they thus drew on the tribes' own genius to formulate their development strategy (to use Nehru's, or more likely Verrier Elwin's, words from the *panchsheel* – see more on Verrier Elwin's influence on Jawaharlal Nehru and his attempt to "strike a new deal for tribal India" in Guha (1999)). I argue, however, that it is debatable whether the success of the introduction of these narratives (in terms of their acceptance and adoption by Gudalur Adivasi activists) is attributable to their innateness to tribal cultures. Rather, I suggest, it is a matter of "development beneficiaries" complying with external priorities, in order to access resources otherwise not obtainable, by a process of "carefully considered contingent capitulation to dominant ideology", through the tactical adoption of upper caste (or activist values in this case) as a means to escape marginality. As Mosse (2011: 162) asserts for a Bhil Development project in Western India:

> In such development encounters, Bhil villagers contended with outsider judgements, and found new cultural forms for aspirations and identities. Once again, by adopting the conventions and technologies of outsiders, these villagers were aligning themselves with cultural practices through which alliances could be forged with benevolent members of the dominant class.

Within AMS/ACCORD, culture has been given both a special and an everyday place. The annual tribal festivals (usually in March) were started in the mid-1980s and Adivasi Day (the anniversary of the 1988 land rights demonstration) is celebrated every year on 5th December. This cultural calendar is enriched with occasional cultural activities (dependent on the availability of funding), such as a *Jenu Habba* (honey festival) in 2012.

The activists describe their tribal unity through cultural festivals strategy as follows:

We saw that Adivasis loved festivals. Every March they spent an entire day walking to Meppadi in Kerala. Yet they were marginalised there, kept outside the temple on the fringe of the main activity. There was urgent need for a cultural revival. To make the people proud of their culture and to get the youngsters to understand their heritage. So that once more they could dance with joy and abandon. We discussed the idea of cultural action as a political statement. And after weeks and weeks of discussion and debate, the idea caught on. We thought it would be a brilliant move to use this festival to unite all the tribes. Till now they had not identified themselves as Adivasis - merely as Paniyas, Kattunayakan, Bettakurumbas, Moolukurumbas and Irulas. The Moolukurumbas and Bettakurumbas did not allow Paniyas and Kattunayakan into their houses. A mild form of untouchability was practised. So we hit on the idea of five elders lighting a lamp together to symbolise tribal unity. It succeeded in its objectives of reviving many dying cultural practices. Songs, dances and games emerged from the recesses of childhood memories. People were amazed because they would never seen many of these dances or games ever before. The first festival held in January 1988 was a run away success and we've never looked back. (ACCORD 2002)

Furthermore, AMS/ACCORD have, from their inception, been engaged in large-scale cultural and linguistic documentation of the four tribal languages (AMS/ACCORD N.D.-g, f,

d, c), out of which arose the development of an elementary school primer in Paniya; scripts for Bettakurumba and Paniya through the modification of the Tamil script, and the production of alphabet charts (AMS 2010b, c); the publication of story books, such as "Putheri" (AMS N.D.-d), "Kilina Penga" (AMS N.D.-c), "Sangam stories" (AMS 2010d), and (ostensibly) Adivasi critiques of Western cultural notions about "the jungle", taking Disney's "The Jungle Book" as an example containing misguided Western notions about the jungle (Kumar 2010). Moreover, AMS/ACCORD's ayurvedic doctor is documenting Adivasi knowledge of herbal medicinal plants, and Chathi, an ex-animator, has revived the theatre form of *koratti nadagam.*

Culture is a popular tool of and for Development. G.N. Devy (2013), founder of the Bhasha Research Institute, a national-level institute for tribal art, culture, and knowledge in Gujarat, asserts that "culture is at the very heart of the process of empowerment and social development". However, can socio-economic development also be hazardous for cultural continuity? Why do AMS/ACCORD harbour the desire to "consolidate" and "centralise" their culture efforts under one umbrella, the culture centre, when culture has, parallel to their efforts, always been ongoing anyway? And when it is "practiced" by the Adivasis themselves anyway? After all, culture had so far worked in a decentralised, rather than a centralised fashion, i.e. in the villages, and in the apposite ritual contexts, rather than in a decontextualised way, as largely encouraged by the activists. Why the fear then that "traditional" Adivasi culture was going extinct? And extinct from whose perspective? How does the difference between how the activists understand culture, and the Adivasis themselves do, contribute to this misconception? As far as my tribal friends told me themselves, "culture" was, in general, highly dependent on ritual context, season, the occurrence of events, and above all the availability of resources, both monetary and human, to be able to perform "culture". Hence culture was – in one respect – highly contingent, dependent on circumstances, and definitely not scheduled and calendarised according to the way the activists planned it. Rather it was performed according to how the tribals saw fit, mostly according to non-human or divine guidance.

At this point, I suggest, one has to qualify between the different elements, on the one hand, and layers of Adivasi cultural life in Gudalur, on the other.

In terms of elements, the rituals surrounding, for instance, the course of the honey gathering season, the first rice harvest (*putheri*), *uchar* (a Mullukurumba ancestor festival, see Magesh (2014)), and, celebrations adopted from the surrounding (largely) Hindu population, such as *vishu* (Keralan new year), *onam* (a Keralan harvest festival), and Christian

celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, (however, not from the equally culturally and religiously present Muslim population in Gudalur) are determined by the annual turn of the seasons, and are thus more or less predictable, even though they are dependent on climatic fluctuations, and natural and social disasters (or occurances, depending on how one chooses to conceptualise events occurring naturally during the course of a human life).

The rituals surrounding one-off, and/or unscheduled events, such as funerals, births, and weddings, however, are of a different order, in terms of being more unpredictable, contingent (in the sense that they cannot always be performed when they should be), and often unplanned or carried out as a reaction to events. Added to this second type of Adivasi "culture", are rituals occurring in other than annual regularity, and rituals practiced specifically in connection with interactions with the divine (such as the *kaavu* – sacred grove festivals that AMS/ACCORD are trying to reinvigorate by their financial sponsorship, to enable the Adivasis to buy the ritual paraphernalia necessary for them). Some of the latter are secret, or only partially accessible to non-specialists, and thus limited to a certain audience. In this context, inadvertent cultural insensibility, simple ignorance (as a result of the secret nature of such knowledge), and non-specificity that does not respect inter-tribal boundaries and faultlines between the different tribes, on the part of the activists, in connection with the public dissemination of knowledge concerning such rituals, and attempts to schedule them according to non-tribal ways, have in the past led to misunderstanding and conflict. I argue that they will continue to do so unless the activists adapt their concepts of Adivasi cultures to those of the different tribes.

In terms of layers there have, since AMS/ACCORD's establishment in the mid-1980s, operated two different spheres of Adivasi cultural practice. The first is the type of everyday tribal "culture" of the different tribes that comprises rituals, way of life, livelihood, etc. These are characterised by simultaneous continuity, change, flexibility, and adaptability. This, incidentally, and ironically, is the culture that the activists diagnosed at their arrival, and continue to conceptualise, as under threat of extinction – to be protected, revived, and strengthened by the second type of cultural activities developed, prescribed, and encouraged by the activists, such as the Culture Centre, annual cultural festivals, the annual commemorative celebration of the 1988 land rights demonstration as Adivasi Day, and the recording, performance and practice of tribal songs and dances outside of their customary contexts.

In general, however, the first sphere of tribal-determined culture has proven notoriously hard to "tame", package, and use for the second sphere of activist-determined cultural

revitalisation of tribal cultures and tribes' conceptual transformation into Adivasis. This, I would argue, has to do, inter alia, with the different characteristics and purposes these cultural spheres have, and their different priorities. The first primarily seeks to nurture relationships and maintain good terms with the non-human and divine, but nevertheless sentient beings of tribal cosmology (gods and goddesses, ancestors, animal spirits, etc.), and thus, by extension, the whole of tribal sociality. This is a fragile, fluid, ongoing process of negotiation, a continuous give and take between the different domains of tribal lifeworlds. It is also a set of interactions that cannot be decontextualised and commodified, or only with qualitative reduction, for the second sphere of "Adivasi" culture operating in Gudalur – the activist attempts of tribal cultural mobilisation.

It is thus the mismatch of different conceptions of culture, I argue, that, even if not fully, thwarts the activists' efforts of utilising tribal culture(s) for mobilisation and Development purposes. To this I would add a general criticism of the activists' uncritical use of culture as a mobilisation tool.

I now turn to one of the ways in which AMS/ACCORD are trying to revitalise tribal culture. This is through the support of *kaavus* (sacred groves) and the associated rituals.

Case study: the revival of *kaavus* (sacred groves)

The invocation of spiritual connectedness, i.e. the 'unity of people and place' (Li 2000: 168), is a well-known indigenist political strategy to assert the legitimacy of land claims. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue that attaching causes to places is important for successful political mobilisation. Kjosavik (2006: 6/7) describes this process for neighbouring Wayanad District in Kerala:

> They feared that the government would find lands for them in far away 'alien' places, where they would be 'out of place'. The Kurumar therefore rejected the Act and its provision for alternate lands. They began to re-articulate their adivasi identity by invoking their attachment to place. Their contention was that it was their right to have the lands restored as they had a historical attachment to the place, in a way the settlers could not claim. They declared that the government could give alternate land to the settlers and their own lands should be restituted. The argument was that the settlers' livelihoods could be reproduced elsewhere unlike the indigenous people's livelihoods that were place-situated.

Interestingly, the revival of kaavus in Gudalur taluk is listed as a goal in a Christian Aid project proposal (ACCORD N.D.-j). It is described as follows by the activists:

Kundakeyni is a Kaavu (sacred grove) of the Chandravattan clan of Paniya tribe. Chathi (an activist of A.M.S.) is one of the elders of this clan. It is just off the Ayyankolli- Kolapalli road, about 40 kms from Gudalur. Just after the AMCO Tea factory and just before the Chetty's temple on the left hand side when coming from Ayyankolli – you have to walk through the courtyard of a chettan (Kerala Christian), through his tea and coffee down into a valley.

Paniyas claim that this Kaavu – like all others – had more than 3 acres of land around it; but, this has been steadily encroached and now there is only about 25-30 cents of land available.

In the middle of all this tea and coffee, this 25 cents is like a total forest! There is the usual traditional spring and all around it are massive trees – including one of the biggest mango trees I have seen. There are all kinds of creepers, bushes, koova plants and other forest trees. Everyone is talking about the elephants that came last night and the two civet cats that jumped out of the tree. You totally forget that you are in the middle of a tea and coffee garden with modernity in the form of a main road and Ayyankolli town only a stone throw away.

Panichis (Paniya women) and small children all sitting under the shade of robusta coffee, somehow give the coffee also a forest like appearance and look down onto a small clearing where the Kaavu rituals are taking place.

A group of men are playing the drums and flute. Three older Panichis and a few older Paniyas including Chathi stand in attendance to the Velichapaadis (oracle).

Two other Panichis are frying paddy and a group of younger Panichis are pounding this into aval (flattened rice) which will later be used in the ritual. Yet another group is busy cooking rice and sambar for everyone there.

Two Velichapaadis in their white mundu (white cloth) and traditional black and red waist cloths run up and down sometimes with a knife, sometimes with a bell, sometimes with both and sometimes empty handed. They are in a trance, bells on their ankles jingling to the drums and flute of the Paniyas.

As the crescendo builds up they shiver and shake and sometimes collapse and are held up by those in attendance. They calm down – there is sudden silence and slowly as the music starts up again they too come alive for another trance. In between, one of them takes off and runs away into the coffee – he is chased and grabbed by some of the men and brought back. People come and ask them questions – Chathi wants to know what they have to do to get a separate path to the Kaavu, so they do not have to pass through the chettan's yard. Questions asked, answers given but not sure if they are satisfied with the answer.

There is one central cement structure – which has been built recently which is the main "shrine". Around that, there are different little shrines – stones sticking out of the ground. Each one represents a different deivam (spirit/god).

More and more Paniyas are joining. Many of them bringing coconuts in offering. Which are washed and placed at the foot of the main shrine.

Slowly, a lot of Chetti (a non-tribal Hindu community) people, dressed in their Sunday best start gathering as well. They come with offering of chickens which are kept aside for the present - they will be sacrificed later. Chathi takes me to a shrine a little away from the rest and he says, "this is where the chickens will be sacrificed. This deivam needs blood, but the others deivams must not see this."

More than 200 people have assembled. Our team members (full-time staff of A.M.S.) – Rateesh, Chandran and Latha – look very different in this atmosphere. Chandran leads much of the drumming.

Where did the money for all this come from? Chathi says, "People donate. But still because this Kaavu was in disuse for a very long time, it cost quite a bit." But, with all the discussion about preserving cultural rituals etc, he decided that no matter what, he would ensure that this would be a great event. It was his responsibility – so he boldly took a few thousand rupees as a salary advance though he did not know how he would pay it back. But, the power of the Kaavu is such that the very evening he decided to take a personal advance, the local Chettis came and contribute Rs.3500/-.

In more than one discussion on alcohol, people have said that one of the problems is that the deivams through the Velichapaadis ask for alcohol – so what can they do? I asked Chathi

about this and he said, "yes, that has now become the norm." But, when he and Velutha and other elders discussed, it was pointed out that the Kaavu is sacred and everyone who comes there must be completely clean – especially the velichapaadis. So there was no question of alcohol during the Kaavu ritual. Happy to say that during the time that I was present there was no one drunk.

Seeing people laugh, dance, young boys fighting with each other to play the drums – there were two young boys who even knew to play the flute – Chathi's coaching perhaps, you cannot help feeling that a revival of these cultural practices which are true community affairs, will contribute to a sense of "well-being" which hopefully will result in decreasing alcohol and perhaps also mental illness. (Thekaekara and AMS 2010)

The Shola Trust's documentation of kaavus, presented as if documented by Adivasi youngsters, reads a little differently:

Inside a Kaavu, the trees, stones and water belong to the gods. When I went to Verkadavu Kaavu there was one big mango tree which had been there for many generations. It was the main tree. I wanted to know what happens when the main tree falls or dies. So I asked the Karnavar, Kutty if he would plant another tree in such a case. He told me that this tree would never fall because god would not let it. In his view, the tree would live forever. Nobody can cut the trees or take firewood from a Kaavu. Even if the firewood is dry, the Paniyas will take permission from the gods.

There are rules for using water in the Kaavu also. The water from the water source in the Kaavu can be used for cooking and bathing only during Kaavu pooja. But they cannot take water out of the Kaavu to their home or anywhere else. The stone is also holy. Once my friend, Subin, sat on a stone in the Kaavu. A small boy came and told us not to sit on the stone because sitting on this stone means that you are sitting on god.

Some Karnavars have seen birds coming to the tree not only to eat fruits but also to take rest. Since a lot of the Kaavus are in tea estates, there are no trees for birds to take rest. But if there is a Kaavu in the estate, they can relax there. Onan, the Karnavar of Karkapalli Kaavu said that birds also come to play and take bath in the stream in the Kaavu. Animals come for shade. Once I saw a Malabar giant squirrel in a Kaavu in Cholady. Three Paniya boys, who had come to show me the Kaavu, told me that the squirrels come regularly to eat the fruit of wild neem tree in the Kaavu. In some Kaavus, palm trees are growing naturally. Kalan anna says that they let these trees grow because squirrels love their fruit. (Kumar 2014)

It is against the backdrop of such activist-led cultural mobilisation that AMS/ACCORD have been trying to establish an indigenous cultural centre called the "First Peoples Place". I was involved in its setup during my fieldwork in 2009/10.

Case study: the "Culture Centre" (CC)/"First Peoples Place"

Fieldwork diary, 11/11/2009, Gudalur

The emerging Interactive Centre for Indigenous Cultures is a conscious attempt of the Adivasi sangam here to reconnect especially the younger generation to their cultural roots, and connect them with the larger Adivasi picture in India and ultimately indigenous peoples

worldwide. This is intended to counteract this generation's exposure to mainstream culture, for which, in no small part, AMS/ACCORD's development efforts are responsible. The extent to which these two goals of the centre are mainly the brainchild of the two visionary original founding members, Stan and Mari Thekaekara, and less so of the Adivasis themselves, is a valid, but naturally very delicate question.

Fieldwork diary, 01/05/2010, Gudalur

AMS/ACCORD have been talking about setting up a Culture Centre for more than 20 years, but the project was constantly postponed and deprioritised in favour of more important life-and-death issues such as health, land, education, etc. The sad truth is that culture is the first element to be sidelined in a people's fight for survival, and the possibility of its expression rests on economic and social security and stability. The other truth is that Adivasi communities have, due to various historical factors, always been very withdrawn and inaccessible, and do not usually harbour the wish to demonstrate their cultural heritage to others, and often prefer to, if they can, limit their interactions with surrounding communities to a minimum.
I am thus beginning to have a strong feeling that this cultural centre is again very much the brainchild of non-Adivasi development professionals such as Stan and Mari Thekaekara, who would like to harness (not at all meant in a negative sense) the power of cultural unity to help Adivasi communities survive the "onslaught" of modernity and mainstream cultures "on their own terms" (their credo). Apart from Mari and other English-speaking staff of AMS/ACCORD, the Adivasis have played and play only a small role in the actual conception of the centre. It is questionable to which extent the communities have at all provided the idea for such a centre, or how much they have been consulted during the process.
These are processes that are hard to access for me for several reasons: they have been going on for a long time; as far as I am aware and from what I have been told, present consultations take place either at the side or after meetings held for other purposes in the villages and area centres. Despite several requests to be taken along to these meetings, I am evidently not considered important enough, possibly because I do not represent either family, long-time friends and well-wishers, or international donor agencies. Admittedly, AMS/ACCORD have seen their fair share of obnoxious anthropological interference. If I may hazard an off-the-record remark, interestingly enough they complain more about anthropologists of Indian origin than foreign ones. As mentioned before, Nurit Bird-David left a very good impression because she helped them understand the Kattunayakan's sometime hunter-gathering lifestyle.

The rationale

The activists' rationale for the CC is worth reproducing to be able to follow their line of reasoning. A project proposal and report can be found in Appendix 9.

Activities

At the outset, I was entrusted with sorting 25 years worth of AMS/ACCORD materials, at the core of which was the cultural documentation of the four tribal communities. I devised a cataloguing system, and started collecting new cultural materials with the help of the Adivasi school children, in the process setting up a library for the emerging CC. Two other priorities were the collection of detailed materials on each of the tribes in the Nilgiris, and the compilation of a history of the AMS.

One of my other tasks was to collate the stories Mari and others had written. I also took part in and documented the cultural activities going on at the time, such as Adivasi Day on 5 December. The actual work on the centre was continuously accompanied by intensive (and at times frustrating) discussions on the conceptual design of the centre, how to represent Adivasi cultures, and, as critically discussed below, how to turn, what had obviously started its life partly in the imaginations of the ACCORD founders, into an Adivasi endeavour. Sources of inspiration and debate came from writers such as Mahasweta Devi, Gopinath Mohanty's "Paraja", G.N. Devy and the Adivasi Academy in Gujarat, Verrier Elwin's writings, and K.S. Singh's writings on Jharkhand and Birsa Munda.

Because the aim for the CC was very much to establish a continuum, and produce a synthesis between indigenous cultures globally and Adivasis in India, one of my first tasks was to build a library on indigenous issues globally. Out of this desire to determine the state of IP globally in 2009, gradually grew an extensive collection, depending on the availability and affordability of literature in India. The aim was to try and reverse unequal information power relationships by opening access to academic literature about Adivasis to Adivasis themselves. The task was an ambitious one, not only because of the necessity of at least two translation processes, from academic English to plain English, and from English to Tamil and/or Malayalam, but also because of the necessity of first encouraging as wide an Adivasi audience as possible to engage in the study of this literature, and, secondly, to simultaneously train them in cultural and literary critique, and subsequently produce a subaltern critique of this body of anthropological literature. AMS/ACCORD's goal behind this is expressed in the project proposal for one of the projects planned for the CC:

Through children's eyes. An Adivasi Anthropological Adventure. A Concept Note from ACCORD

Background
[…]
While these interventions have gone a long way to improve the lives of the Adivasis, the pressure of the dominant communities around them has started rapidly eroding their cultural identity and social fabric. A whole generation of young people are growing up not understanding their own history, the richness of their cultural heritage and the huge body of traditional knowledge.

ACCORD and Vidyodaya are in the process of setting up a cultural centre, for and by the Adivasis that will act as a hub of cultural activity and reflection. As part of this process we intend to photographically capture various aspects of the lives of the Adivasis over a period of time. It is proposed that this is done by the children themselves.

The Proposed Project

Over the years, people from all over the world have studied and researched the Adivasis here. We feel that the time has come for the people themselves to record their lives and to share their perspective with the rest of the world – rather than have it interpreted for them by outsiders. Who better to do this than Adivasi children? From some of our earlier experiments of putting cameras in children's hands, we have found that they capture some amazing and unusual aspects of their lives – photographs that no outsider can take. Also their perspective of what is interesting and worth recording is very different. Hence this project.

[…]

But we feel that this project will do far more than just generate a fascinating collection of photographs. The process of the children taking photographs on a daily basis at the village level we believe will spark a lot of discussion within the community about their culture and identity. So also with the children. All this we hope will generate a renewed interest in their culture and heritage leading to look at ways of preserving what they perceive to be important in their culture. (Thekaekara 2010d)

By way of an anti-example, to get an idea of "what the CC should not look like" (Stan), I went to visit the Tribal Research Museum in Ooty, with its static displays, taxidermied animals, and eerie life-size wax cabinet-like figures of the tribal peoples of the region. The overall impression was one of tribal cultures preserved in aspic. The visit had the desired effect – I came away convinced that this was not the way to represent tribal cultures.

In March 2010, in an attempt to blur the boundaries between the centre and the periphery, the Darpana Dance Academy from Gujarat, under the artistic direction of acclaimed dancer and activist Mallika Sarabbhai, came to dance for the Adivasis in the village of Chembakolli. The Kattunayakan and Mullukurumba returned the favour by performing some of their own dances. As Demmer (2008) observes, "performances provide a forum for the negotiation of modernity and nationhood" and "performative contexts such as rituals and shamanic practices are often used as platforms where statehood and modernity are challenged, opened up for discussion or overtly criticized". The Darpana performance had interesting ramifications, as it attracted not only an Adivasi audience, but also Gudalur's intellectual and cultural "elite". The Dance Academy's visit was a prime opportunity to witness interaction between AMS/ACCORD and other groups working with Adivasis in India they considered "genuine". This was another opportunity to compare how differently they interact with the different stakeholders involved in their work, for instance, with representatives of a clerical order working with Adivasis, representatives of Christian Aid (one of their main funders with whom they have a somewhat strained relationship), and prospective funders.

Fieldwork diary, 21/03/2010, Gudalur

Driving back from Chembakolli to Gudalur town in Stan's car after the Darpana et al. performance. We talked about what is going on (or not) in the CC. They started having tribe-wise meetings of leaders and elders, and are pushing the revival of traditional leaders (*karuvannan*). A deep-seated conflict in the Paniya community, that not even Stan knew about, only emerged yesterday at a meeting. As long as the conflict is unresolved, the Paniya of one *kollu* [moiety] will not dance at any of the other's events, which is why they did not dance in Chembakolli today. The Paniya are still afraid of the Kattunayakan as sorcerers. The Kattunayakan are believed to be black-magic practitioners who can change shape.

Fieldwork diary, 23/04/2010, Gudalur

Ramdas disagreed with Stan when I mentioned the rift in Paniya society Stan alluded to the other day. Ramdas thinks this could just be a pretext not to interact with the Kattunayakan, e.g. when the Paniyas would not dance in Chembakolli. Ramdas thinks the Paniyas have not been properly integrated yet, i.e. that they are still very much "a people of their own".

Next, in March 2010, most of the people involved in the culture project came together for a brainstorming meeting. Stan, as always, dominated the meeting and it became clear to me then that I would have only very little say in the overall direction of the development of the centre (which had been completely haphazard, as far as I could tell, over the past 20 years they had been planning to set up the CC). This time around they asked me to train two Adivasi youngsters (who they still had to recruit), and possibly also some of the older school children as curators and researchers for the museum. As a result I drew up a proposal, Adivasi Kids with Recorders, for Adivasi youngsters to document their cultures' knowledge in its original oral form. In an e-mail sent after the meeting I formulated my contribution to the centre thus:

One area is purely the collection of information about Adivasis that is already out there in order to create an Adivasi Resource Centre. The aim is to create a multilingual database on knowledge related to Adivasis in general, based on ACCORD's existing materials and those I have collected over the years. This database has to be accessible to as many people as possible in terms of content, language, complexity/depth, type of medium, etc. This involves sourcing/acquiring as many materials in as many forms as possible about Adivasis, and successively translating extracts/synopses thereof into Tamil/Malayalam.
The second area concerns the creation of a capacity pool:
If I was to formulate a number of goals for this, it would be to share the tools necessary to continue the work on the centre with the tribal youngsters, to arouse their passion for further developing the materials, both in content and medium, and, after some time, for them to refer to the centre as "their" centre.
When talking about Adivasi cultures we need to see their cultural expressions primarily as oral expressions. When it comes to documenting and capturing this diversity of oral cultural expressions, we therefore cannot foreground the written word as the medium of documentation or record. Technologies like audio and video recording, and the provision of adequate playback facilities, can be a powerful tool for bridging the gap between oral

expression and documentation. I would therefore see the audio and video recording of stories, epics, songs, plays, etc. as a prime priority.

In a personal fieldnote I summarised my aspirations for the CC as follows:

What has irked me right from the beginning of my engagement with everything Adivasi is the overwhelming dominance of accounts about, but not by Adivasis. I am no exception. Surely, Adivasis are not lacking in self-expression, their arts, music, dance, and poetry being ample proof of this. So where is the accompanying self-representation, the social fact of Adivasis writing, speaking, and communicating about themselves to others, i.e. creating representational space for themselves, instead of "others" invading their physical space, and in the wake of this often violating their cultural integrity and dignity, by misrepresenting them towards ends not related to their, but someone's else's benefit and welfare?
Maybe, I thought, the kind of self-representation I was seeking, that I had found with other so-called indigenous peoples, was inherently not a part of Adivasi culture. G.N. Devy states, "Of all the things I have learnt about the Adivasis, the most important is that we know very little about them." Maybe the Adivasis' attempts at staying aloof from dominant cultures by both physical withdrawal and cultural traditionalism had been successful after all. Maybe an entire world of tribal self-representation existed only within and only for them in their own societies, not intended for discovery or exploitation by outsiders.
Maybe, I told myself, I just had not looked hard enough, or did not have the requisite cultural or linguistic skills to discover forms of Adivasi self-expression. Maybe I was again, in an ironic distortion of my original intention, imposing my own, an external, conception of self-representation.
I learned that other indigenous peoples' desire to correct not only the legal, economic and political, but also the cultural injustice done to them over the centuries, and their attempts at putting the "talk" about them back into their own mouths, were born out of a long and painful history of both wilful and careless misrepresentation, with more often than not catastrophic consequences for their present and future survival. Surely, then, I reasoned, attempts to right this cultural injustice also had to be present among tribal people in India, who had been pushed about this subcontinent they call their ancestral homeland for centuries, into the forest and out of it; whose identity had for more than a century been straightjacketed into exclusive schedules and lists; who had rebelled against colonial and postcolonial oppression; whose cultures had survived in pockets despite attempts at "developing" them.
The next question raised its head: When had the pendulum finally started to swing the other way? When had indigenous peoples started acquiring the means to question the orientalising gaze trained on them? When had indigenous men and women started to make inroads into the representational realm previously almost exclusively reserved for the economically superior, white, male explorer, anthropologist, administrator, cartographer, missionary, legislator? When had (some) indigenous peoples started appropriating initially external means of representation, to not only turn the exoticising lens around, but firmly place the decision-making powers regarding the representation of their cultures into their own hands. And what had enabled them to do this?
Maybe, then, the lack of Adivasi self-representation in the various publics was not so much a matter of cultural sensitivities, but of access to the means of representation?
Something had to change. Surely, if similarly marginalised ethnic minorities such as the Yanomamö, Bushmen, Australian Aboriginals, Kayapo, etc. had managed to turn the representational tide around (or had they?), Adivasis had already done it and were doing it right now.

The task now was to find two Adivasi youngsters I would train. Two possible candidates, Ramesh (who did not turn out to be suitable for the job) and Methi (who did because of her superior interpersonal and English skills), two ex-Vidyodaya schoolkids, had been found by Easter 2010. The problem with most other candidates was that they were either in full-time higher education, would not be able to support themselves and their families from the meagre salary AMS/ACCORD paid or, as in Methi's case, as we learned soon after Easter, were about to be married off. By the time I left Gudalur, they had not yet found two suitable people.

In the meantime, I formulated a proposal, "From Representation to Presentation: Ideas for How the Cultural Centre Could Be". Great resources in this respect were Joy Hendry's (2005) "Reclaiming Culture: Indigenous Peoples and Self-Representation", her account of indigenous people's efforts to regain control over their representation, focussing mainly on museums and cultural centres in the Western Hemisphere; G.N. Devy's (2006) "A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence" and Devy et al.'s (2009) "Indigeneity: culture and representation. Proceedings of the 2008 Chotro Conference on Indigenous Languages, Culture, and Society". Alice Tilche's (2009) article "Translating Museums" on how she negotiated the translation processes between Adivasi cultures and the museum concept necessary for setting up the Adivasi Museum of Voice in Tejgadh, Gujarat, provided a significant signpost for formulating my grievances with the CC setup at the time. Talking to the Adivasis themselves then led me to question several inescapable contradictions I now discuss.

Discussion

Tilche (2011: 33) observes for the Adivasi Academy in Gujarat that "ethnography was in a sense already at work". Similarly, what I was doing at the CC gradually turned into a meta-ethnography of the ethnographic work of the centre.

Undoubtedly, the CC had highflying ideals. It was supposed to be about cultural assertion and cultural justice, about transforming muted communities, deprived of the power of speech, into vocal advocates of their own destiny, the foregrounding and preservation of indigenous languages, placing indigenous literature and languages at the forefront because, ultimately, their cultures and identities could only authentically be preserved in their native languages, and putting indigenous people first, i.e. creating a meeting place not only for and about, but by first peoples. Could the centre ultimately be a model of tribal self-representation, like the activists perceived the Adivasi Academy/Tribal Museum of Voice in Tejgadh (Devy, Davis et

al. 2008) to be? As Tilche (2011: 23f.) validly questions though, "Adivasi Museums and art, Tribal scripts, village theatre and other forms of cultural expression are here being used as strategies for empowerment – the question is for whom?"

A few problematic issues thus soon came to the fore.

The culture project aimed to directly link Adivasis with other indigenous communities from around the world, along the lines of JC seeking to *directly* link producer, investor, and consumer communities. By Adivasis becoming part of a "world indigenous culture", local identities would be strengthened by establishing global commonalities with other "indigenous" peoples. How directly could Native American, Australian, and other indigeneity discourses be applied to Gudalur's Adivasis though?

The activists' work was dominated by the cultural survival narrative: cultural revitalisation meant "how to relaunch disappearing cultures", i.e. "steeping a new generation of villagers in their own quickly disappearing traditions" (Giridharadas 2008). In Gudalur this amounted to persuading an increasingly disillusioned younger generation, lured into "mainstream" culture by alcohol and consumer goods, that their culture was worth preserving. The dilemma was an obvious one – the inherent contradictions in the simultaneous existence of modern and anti-modern tribal identities were very difficult to negotiate.

An overriding concern of the centre was how to "demuseumise" tribal and indigenous cultures, i.e. to find an appropriate way of representing IP. The issue was how to find the balance between staying true to traditional tribal identity and representing modern Adivasi indigeneity. Everyone had differing opinions on what modern tribal identity actually was. There was a perceived need to balance and counteract the disruptions and discontinuities of modernisation (Stilz 2009: 15). The question then was how to truthfully capture the disjunctions and contradictions of producing their own particular version of indigenous locality (Appadurai 1996: 186). Present-day tribal cultures were conceptualised by Stan as a clash of modern and tribal cultures – the task was to find a synthesis between the two. The question I asked myself was whether salvage anthropology and cultural revival were complimentary, or in fact antithetical.

Tilche (2011: 19) discusses Latour's understanding of purification as a separation between the world of humans and things. Purification involves a de-association of objects (things) from their human-embeddedness. I asked myself whether culture could be controlled and thus preserved via objectification. By decontextualising and dehumanising objects, were they not also being decultured, and thus deprived of their tribalness? Or was objects' tribalness only achieved through the separation/severance from their everyday lifeworlds, and the assignment

of value to them other than their everyday practical use? As a result, I began to question whether the tribal was mainly constituted exogenously, e.g. by someone other than a member of the tribe labelling something as tribal or through the valorisation of custom.

I also came to question whether this centre was really the Adivasis' idea, as claimed by AMS/ACCORD, or, essentially the activists', i.e. whether the Adivasis really wanted this centre, or whether they actually preferred to "live" their cultures in their villages. I began to ask how "endangered" the Adivasis themselves really perceived their cultures and languages to be, and whether the trope of "endangered" tribal cultures and languages was essentially a Western one. After all, if I and my children spoke our language, how could it be "endangered"? I began to examine the assertion that Adivasi cultures would "disappear" in a few generations, as predicted by one of the AMS/ACCORD staff, and that "something had to be done about it", as voiced by another. Also, if divisions, both within and among Adivasi communities, were still present, how much of an impact had AMS/ACCORD's efforts at cultural unity under the umbrella term Adivasi, among the initially very disparate Mullukurumba, Paniya, Kattunayakan, Bettakurumba and Irular, really had? Did AMS/ACCORD see these remains of disunity as an obstacle on the road towards the recovery of control over the local economy and thus to economic security, health, and education? The central question then was whether a cultural centre could at all aid in halting or even reversing what AMS/ACCORD perceived to be a process of cultural erosion, in part caused by the economic development introduced by their interventions.

An ex-AMS/ACCORD activist now working for Keystone in nearby Kotagiri made another valid point. She questioned what good it was to tuck the CC away in a remote place, such as Gudalur, if one wanted the centre to be a dialogue, not only between tribals, but also tribals and non-tribals, i.e. if one wanted as many non-tribal people as possible to benefit from the Adivasis' knowledge? Would the latter be enough mainly through online dissemination?

Taking all of the above points together, the contradictions inherent in the conceptualisation of the centre soon became inescapable.

The contradictions of culture in the Culture Centre

"Culture" and the performance of culture are context-, place- and otherwise dependent activities. Correspondingly, Adivasis do not usually meet up in a decontextualised place to "perform" culture for the delectation of other Adivasis or non-Adivasis because the "practice" of culture is tied to certain rules and traditions, conditions and effects. Culture is inseparable from everyday life. It is interwoven, embodied, and experienced according to usually highly specific and codified rules. Culture serves particular purposes. Its enactment and function

often cannot be separated. This points to the "danger" of the medium through which culture is expressed ossifying the content of the cultural act. "Culture" then does not take lightly to being decontextualised, or the act and its context becoming separated.

One of the occasions when the contradictions of culture surfaced was when the activists requested Adivasis to dance at the Darpana performance in Chembakolli in March 2010. To everyone's surprise, only the Mullukurumba performed their *vatakalli* and *kolkalli* stick dances, and the Kattunayakans their dance with the tudi and cheenam. The Bettakurumba and Paniya were absent. As I learned later, Adivasis usually expressly (as avowed even by the activists themselves) "only dance for themselves". In this regard, AMS/ACCORD had even produced an educational video in the 1980s (slightly ironically) titled "We only dance for ourselves", about the assertion of Adivasi identity vis-à-vis mainstream culture, expressed through their refusal to be reduced to cultural exhibits at government, and, interestingly, other NGOs' events. Nevertheless, in the service of AMS/ACCORD's own project of cultural regeneration, through the fostering of inter-tribal and inter-indigenous cultural understanding, cross-fertilisation, and thereby unity, the overriding of such "minor" tribal cultural idiosyncrasies did not seem to matter, or could be risked for the "greater" good of tribal development and therefore survival. At the risk of sounding overscrupulous, this begs the question, however, whether it is not these "insignificant" acts of cultural ignorance, and thereby violence, that both thwart the activists' own efforts, and possibly contribute to the souring of both inter-tribal and tribal-NGO relations, by neglecting to take into account the cultural differences between tribes, and the cultural preferences of individual tribes.

Stan's comment on the way back from the Chembakolli Darpana dance event (see the above fieldnote) was also significant. At this occasion, he commented that, even after all these years, they (the activists) do not fully understand the tribals. This was a comment he made after telling the story of one of the latest strifes between the Paniya and the Bettakurumba, his unawareness of it, and that it had only surfaced when it had prevented the successful carrying out of a project involving the two tribes. In this context, I argue that the activists' avowal that "they will never fully know or understand the tribals, how they think and act" (Stan) in fact reaffirms dichotomising tribal/non-tribal othering. It positions Adivasis in a culturally exclusive realm of their own totally different from others. This, I suggest, serves to substantiate the activists' self-ascribed position as the guardians of this exclusive tribal cultural realm.

Over time I thus became more critical of the CC, and also frustrated by the lack of communication (caused by rifts between the various founding members of ACCORD, the

hospital, the school, etc. that had appeared over the last few years) between the different organisations and members of staff deputed to work on the CC, their lack of time (most often due to funding obligations), and even lack of interest. The truth is that AMS/ACCORD, through their expansion, have become a rather sprawling complex of sub-organisations. Not everyone gets to meet regularly any more as they used to do. For instance, in the end it was impossible to organise another get-together on the CC before my departure.

Another problem was that there was hardly any scope for the realisation of other people's ideas in the CC. Ultimately, the CC was going to end up looking the way Stan wanted it to, as he was very possessive about his ideas. That the entire CC enterprise was fraught with contradictions became not only obvious during my time with the CC, but also when I followed their work after my departure. An ethnographic moment exhibiting the Rashomon effect (see, for instance, Heider 1988) arose, for instance, when I read Mari and her son Tariq's completely different takes on an Adivasi festival in Ranchi that the Gudalur Adivasis attended with them in 2012. While Mari waxed lyrical about transethnic tribal unity and the coming together of different Adivasi ethnic groups from all across India, which, according to Mari, enabled these Adivasis to overcome inter-tribal boundaries and a shared Adivasi identity to emerge, Tariq was quite critical about the potential for such Adivasi togetherness to develop and elaborated conflict lines much more forcefully.

While I value the time and insights born out of working at the CC, I was reminded of van Schendel's (2011: 26) question, "Should anthropologists and historians be drawn into 'claims research' – research commissioned by 'indigenous' groups to present new interpretations of history that support their claims?" Nevertheless, since my departure I have continued to send them materials, and have been in regular touch and helped new volunteers (rather disappointingly, all non-Adivasi like myself).

One of the things I have learned from working on the CC is best be expressed in the morale of the following story: that is, to let the Adivasis get on with it themselves. This, I suggest, echoes the recurring wish expressed by Adivasis to "just be left alone" – by NGOs as well as the state and other meddlesome agents.

Conserving Adivasi Knowledge

With our great emphasis on getting all the kids to go to school we are cutting them off from the forests and their sustainable lives. They cannot take a few days off here and there to spend time with their parents in the forests and learn the old ways and traditions. That would make them "absent" from school, and that was a huge problem for us teachers to be able to maintain continuity.

So now we are trying to address this issue. We are trying to come up with ways in which some of the knowledge of the elders can be passed on to the kids, despite the fact that they have to go to school. We cannot try to be romantics and tell them their way of life is beautiful and should not be changed – kids should not go to school and they as a community should not modernise. Realistically the kids have to be given exposure to the big bad outside world, and then given the opportunity to choose what they want to do with their lives after that. So tentatively we have decided to have some of the parents of these kids to take 'classes' in the forests twice a month. To start off things will be easy – the tenth standard (15 year olds) science book has chapters on medicinal plants, wildlife and farming. These can be easily (and much better) taught by the parents. They will have to decide the curriculum and everything else that goes with it. Hopefully let it evolve with time, and go much beyond the prescribed text book.

So this was supposed to be a session to plan concrete steps in which this could be done. What age group? How and when were we going to start things off? Should we start with chapters on farming, wildlife and medicinal plants? Who was going to volunteer to actually take the classes? What was the curriculum going to be like? But in typical Adivasi fashion, we spent very little time actually talking about this. They started off by all agreeing that this was very important. And then everyone started talking about how sad it was that the kids today did not know this and that and the other. Once everyone had individually stated how important they thought this initiative was and how sad it was that all this knowledge was being lost things moved to honey – its now the season for collecting honey.

And before I knew it it was decided we should go and look at some trees with hives that were ready to be harvested. I was a bit worried about whether we would get to talk about any of the things I had on my list. But I was assured that we would "talk along the way".

And we talked all along the way, but stayed very far from my list. And oh yes, almost everything was in Kattunayakan – I was mostly a spectator struggling to understand what was happening. But what they did talk about was basically a string of stories – of collecting honey, bear attacks, bee attacks, forest guards confiscating honey, traditional remedies and many many others. We even went to some of the famous trees with a large number of hives on them.

I thoroughly enjoyed all these, but was a bit disappointed at the end of the "meeting" that we had not come to any firm conclusions as to how we were going to proceed. But then as I am about to leave (I even got on my motor bike) there is a flurry of decisions. Selvan and Karian were going to collect honey as soon as it got a bit darker in the nights (the moon is too bright these days). So they could take a group of 10 kids with them. Marigan and Suresh would ask around and make a list of kids in the 13-18 age group who could go. They all felt that they wanted a book and 'CD' made with photographs and videos that can be kept in the school and area office. So I was to go with them as well. This time they would only be getting "stick honey", but in about a months time they were going to get "rock honey". But the CD should contain both, so I should be ready to go again in about a month. And next year in the honey season if Kariyan and Selvan were not free we could show the CD to whoever else was going, and so the kids could go with them. And since not all the kids could actually go into the forest we could show the CD to all the others in school so that they will also have some idea of honey gathering.

And just like that it was all done – everything was decided in about 10 minutes. (Thekaekara 2008-09)

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Having discussed the different loci of culture within AMS/ACCORD, I now turn to elucidating some of the main Adivasi indigeneity themes in the activists' stories in Part IV. The contradictions inherent in these themes I then analyse in the next chapter, "Stories of chai for change?", in Part II, "Activist imaginaries of Adivasi indigeneities and their problems".

Part IV

Dominant activist narratives and narrative strategies

The AMS/ACCORD activists are narrative persuasiveness personified. One of the ways they achieve this is through the strong moral characterisation of the main characters in their stories, the Adivasis. Flynn (2008: 311) asserts that "[a] narrative functions best when it works to assist the reader to identify characters with moral positions". Moral positions often contain recurring, essentialised themes. The activists employ what Spivak terms strategic essentialism: the need to accept temporarily an "essentialist" position in order to be able to act. In the process of their narrativisation, Adivasi identities are essentialised and activists prefer essentialised representations of Adivasi identities for their stories. Tilche (2011: 29), however, warns of the "limitations of mobilisations based on essentialised notions of Adivasi cultural uniqueness and originality". This is a trap many IP activists fall into – to argue for IP's rights on the basis of (supposedly) special characteristics, thereby freezeframing IP, when it would often be more expedient to argue for their rights on the basis of their shared humanity. This constitutes part of a larger move away from class-based towards identity-based mobilisation favoured by new social movements – a move decried by Marxist scholars such as Kjosavik (2011: 131), who advocate the continued relevance of class-based political campaigning, and champion the joining of forces and the creation of alliances between Adivasis and other exploited classes on the basis of their shared oppression.

The contradictions inherent in the activists' attempts at lending their campaigns credibility based on an ill-devised, essentialised authenticity, by engineering the myth of an Adivasi/tribal-only originated movement, beg the question whether, as with other similar struggles involving, inter alia, indigenous and/or tribal peoples, it would not be more advantageous to unite different peoples' struggles under the banner of the similar causes they are fighting for, rather than singling out certain people supposedly worthy of more support, and thus inevitably dividing the struggle along class/caste/ethnic etc. lines. Perhaps it would be the Adivasis who would gain most from this. Then again, such an argument is rather academic in a resource-scarce context such as India. It also quickly maneuvers one into the

murky waters of both the discussion surrounding the pros and cons of constitutionally enshrined positive discrimination/affirmative action entitlements for Scheduled Tribes, and of the selective funding politics of international development donors.

Essentialisation thus has its benefits and limits. Typical essentialised Adivasi virtues the activists tout are, for instance, the non-casteism of Adivasi societies (this may be true within individual Adivasi groups, however, social hierarchies do exist between different tribal groups); and the anti-authoritarianism and love of personal freedom of Adivasis, which is, however, construed negatively if it concerns NGO business.

Phenomena the Gudalur activists rally against are Hindu right-wing conversion attempts and forcible abductions of young Adivasis to (re)training camps (that do not conform to Adivasis' innate "nature" romantically touted as an – albeit ambiguous – virtue); and the non-recognition of distinct Adivasi religions and/or their subsumption under a broad definition of Hinduism (not as a separate form of Hinduism). The activists also protest against the suppression of Adivasi culture in GTRs (government tribal schools), and the bribery of Adivasis by political parties before elections to increase vote banks.

Examples of the activists' particular brand of externally ascribed, essentialising indigeneity can be found, inter alia, on the blogs written by them: "But indigenous people have patience as an inbuilt trait. God knows, they've had centuries of practice" (Marcel Thekaekara 2013b). Another recurring theme in the activists' reflections concerns the self-sacrifice (mostly of originally middle-class activists) of NGO life and of "living with the people". The activists castigate the tribals' stubbornness and traditionalism, while at the same time glorifying the Adivasis' resilience, their adaptedness to their environments (compared to non-tribal NGO workers), and their frugality – in a classic one-way othering process.

Recurring themes in Mari's writing, in particular, are:

- The motifs contained in Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" (Achebe 1958): that is of a culture on the verge of change; the tension between tradition and change and how this affects the individual and her/his choices; the resistance to change because it may imply loss of societal status; the refuge societal outcasts find in Christianity; the dependence of traditions on storytelling and thus language; and the concomitant threat of the decline of traditions with the loss of language (which is mirrored by the fear of extinction and hence the promotion of the tribal languages in the Nilgiris by the activists);
- Jawarhalal Nehru's "genius" that he ascribed to tribes in his panchsheel (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence treaty);

- Remnants of imperial language in the characterisation of Adivasis as the former lords/kings/monarchs of "their" land (the land they lived on and were deprived of for lack of "modern" land titles);
- The superiority of Adivasis' "ancient", "primordial" ways of life over the "crass" and "materialistic" modern world, i.e. the neo-primitivist discourse (Ghosh 2006: 520) of "the invention of a pristine primitive figure who acts as a persistent critique of a decadent modernity" (ibid.); and
- Unspoiltness and pristineness as a cultural desideratum, and the necessity of keeping or restoring Adivasi cultures to such a state.

These contradictory tropes (implicitly and explicitly) held by the Gudalur activists are resoundingly echoed by Mosse (2005: 48f.), in his detailed description of the notions about Bhil Adivasis rife in his research area in Gujarat, and the attendant missionary-type civilising aspirations of the Development workers:

> The surrounding Bhils were an uncultured 'hand-to- mouth' people, driven by immediate appetites and the compulsions of subsistence survival, without thrift or thought for the future, ignorant and fearful of new technology. These were innocent people, cheated and exploited by usurious moneylenders and traders, by junior state officials, especially forest guards and the police. They were culturally other, unclean, 'not at all civilised in my eyes' […] But equally these were a dangerous, liquor-drinking and wild people of the forest, armed with bows and arrows, highwaymen, thieves and dacoits, a source of insecurity to newly recruited field staff. These images not only coloured the early impressions of middle-class project workers, they also added a cultural significance to their development efforts. Here were places where the social worker or Community Organiser could make history by animating and releasing those imprisoned in material and cultural poverty (cf. Hardiman 1987a[1995]: 8, Scheper-Hughes 1992: 53ff). Their inputs, whether soil conservation, seeds or savings, could be symbols of cultural reform, betterment, perhaps 'civilisation'. Even without the explicit missionary concept of 'conversion', project workers could tacitly understand their role in terms of saving, rescuing or lifting a backward people 'up to our level' (Padel 2000: 297).

The following blog by Mari vividly illustrates most of the Adivasi tropes held dear by the activists that I encountered during my time in Gudalur and beyond (Thekaekara 2012):

Lessons of the past for young Adivasi

Culture is a tricky thing. How do we define it? Who decides when customs and traditions, even ancient, cherished ones, can be dispensed with? These and many other similar questions have been debated by the Adivasi groups we (ACCORD, an NGO in the Nilgiri hills of Tamil Nadu) work with for the last 25 years. Yet, culture was not a priority, it was neither life threatening, nor in clear and present danger (we thought). And so land, human rights, health, education and housing took priority.

A quarter of a century later, we realize with dismay that the Gudalur Adivasi kids who go to local schools are losing their language, customs and traditions. My husband, Stan, adores kids and is a born teacher. While taking a class for primary school teachers-to-be, school leavers of around 18 years old, he asked them about their backgrounds, tribes etc. He

returned home the first evening really saddened by the fact that some kids did not know their fathers had been in jail, fighting to save their land. When asked what Adivasi (original settlers like aboriginal people) meant, they said poor, primitive, at the bottom of society, uneducated, illiterate – almost identical to what their parents might have said 25 years ago, before they began organizing themselves to create an identity they could take pride in. Had we come full circle? Was it all in vain?

So Stan began talking about Adivasi culture and philosophy, that Adivasis constituted eight per cent of India's population, the fact that they shared an ethos with indigenous groups all around the world. That indigenous people are unique because they mostly practise equality which is brought about by design, not chance. He talked about how some tribes in Africa distributed their goats and cattle when someone lost theirs to death, disease or drought and how these values were inculcated in them through rituals and everyday practices.

The young people began discussions about each other's customs. The youngsters doing the course were Paniyas, Bettakurumbas and Kattunayakan. They exchanged stories of how equality and sharing was instilled even in little children in their individual tribes. We non-Adivasis were constantly stunned by the fact that Adivasi kids never fought for a sweet, however tiny. They always shared it solemnly and equally, a truly amazing sight to see.

At the end of the first week, Stan then gave them a weekend assignment. They were to go home and ask their parents and grandparents to tell them stories of the past. The stories about customs, traditions and food, or just stories, were to be recorded and shared when they returned.

The group came back on Monday morning brimming over with information. The stories they told were charming and had a logic of their own, often hard for outsiders to comprehend. But what turned the tide for us was when a visiting trustee of a donor agency asked them what they planned to do after the training was over. On the first day, when Stan had asked them a similar question, they had said maths, history, english. A week later they announced to the visiting trustee: 'We are going to teach all the kids what Adivasi means and that our people are spread out all over India and all over the world. That our parents and grandparents fought to retain our ancestral land and that Adivasis were the first people to rise up against colonialism. They fought the British in the 1700s and could not be subjugated. That's why they remained proud and independent.' The outburst left everyone stunned.

Stan returned home beaming, grinning from ear to ear. One of the best weeks of his life. The lessons had been well learned.

Following this overview of the main themes prominent in the writing of the activists about Adivasis I now introduce six of these in greater detail: indigeneity, environmental stewardship, cultural unity, community/family, Adivasi glorification, and the narrative of "the story" itself (i.e. the story of the Gudalur Adivasis).

The narrative of indigeneity

First people

Our people have lived in these forests since ancient times. We are tribal people, known as Adivasi, which means 'first people'.

Bommi: Is it true that we're like the aborigines of Australia? I heard about them in school.

Marigan: Yes, they're tribal people too. Whereas Aborigines were the first people in Australia, Adivasis were the first people in India. And today there are 69 million of us, speaking more than 100 languages!

But we are among the poorest people here. We've been treated badly for as long as I can remember; living like slaves. Some people call us janglis, like wild animals. They do not want to be near us. That's why you find Adivasi people living in the forests and hills, far away from big cities.

It is so wonderful that you and your sisters go to a friendly school; that we have the Adivasi hospital in Gudalur. Many of our children do not have schools to go to and when they do, they are given a hard time.

Bommi: I know, my friend Mari from Kanjikolly goes to a different school to me and her teacher insists on calling her Beena. He says everyone must have a non-tribal name. Some of the children make fun of her living in the forest.

Marigan: Our people should be so proud of living in the forest. We once roamed all the forests in this area.

In those days, when there were thick forests, the animals never bothered us. We lived in peace. We could walk past the elephants and they would nod to us. Then, when the outsiders came and chopped down trees, the elephants had less food so they started eating our crops. Sometimes, they would chase us!

When these outsiders came they liked to take over the land. They showed us pieces of paper and said, "This proves this is my land. Keep out!" This was strange for us – we do not believe land can be owned. For us, land is like the air. It is not made by people so it cannot be owned by people.

Bommi: Yes, we do not even have a lock on our door. We share. To us the forest belongs to everyone. Who were these outsiders grandpa?

Marigan: Well, some British people came here a long time back. They set about clearing the forest to make way for huge tea and coffee estates, and they used the timber to make railway lines and ships.

The British totally ignored our right to the forest. We were forced to give up the land we were living on. We did this quietly, because we were afraid. We would find a new place in the forest and rebuild our homes from scratch. And then they would come there and force us to move on again.

Then, during the 1960s, about 40 years ago, many non-tribal people moved to the area. They cleared even more forest for even more estates and they cheated our people out of even more land.

We were treated like beggars. We were told to go; and we could not do anything about it because we did not have the all- important pieces of paper to say that the land was ours.

And, as if that was not enough, in the 1970s the Indian government took over the remaining forests, turning a huge area into Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary. They said only animals can live here, and they began to fine and imprison Adivasi people for collecting food or wood from the forest.

We were terrified. We felt like we were losing control. Estate owners and forest officials would tear down our homes and destroy our crops. They would chase us off the land. We would go to a new place. We would live there for a while and they would come and say they needed more land so we had to move on.

Bommi: So, you could not live from the forest anymore?

Marigan: That's right. We could not live from the forest anymore. We ended up being coolies, that's like labourers, on the land that was once ours. I spent many years as a young man planting ginger and picking tea on big estates that were once forest.

Bommi: What happened next? How did it all change?

Marigan: You'll have to wait until tomorrow! It is getting late now and we need to collect water from the stream before it gets too dark. (ActionAid and ACCORD 2009)

Translated into activist rhetoric, the Gudalur indigeneity narrative goes 1) "'tribals' are Adivasis and Adivasis are indigenous peoples", thus "turning tribes on their heads" (van Schendel 2011: 25) since the term IP implies that,

> [t]here is no sense of backwardness, wildness or isolation from the mainstream. On the contrary, the idea of indigeneity marginalizes the 'mainstream' and unsettles the hierarchical assumptions of civilization vs. wildness. It implies a radical switch of perspective but it shares with the idea of 'tribe' two characteristics: simplification and boundary making (Li 2000 cited in van Schendel 2011: 25).

Indigeneity then is a discursive concept – as with any identity construction it is created in interaction with and through boundary making with members of other communities of different ethnic and tribal affiliation. As Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011: 2) note, "indigeneity thus transgresses the boundaries of its own 'indigenousness', traverses multiple routes and assumes diverse forms".

Indigeneity needs to be embodied by people in order to exist and thus to be able to be used as a tool for development. While indigeneity in the 21st century does not make a claim to consistency, it emphasises two relational identity aspects: 1) a relationship of belonging to a particular territory on the basis of a long association with it, and 2) a notion of being oppressed by later arrivals in the territory or being exploited by postcolonial states in a situation of internal colonialism (Prabhu 2004; van Schendel 2011). In Gudalur, indigeneity was reimagined by the activists as something that had to be reincorporated in the local tribal people. The activists conceptualised indigeneity as having been part of Adivasis' original cultural tribality all along, on account of the historical antecedence of their settlements and their prior demographic dominance in the region. Both of these had been lost as a result of land alienation, due to the influx of settlers and the expansion of the plantation economy, which resulted in the economic and social marginalisation of Adivasis. In the activists' reasoning, it thus took the concept of indigeneity to realise for the Gudalur "tribals" the two related claims aspects of indigenism – ancestrality and non-dominance, i.e. the "claim to a particular part of the earth's surface on the basis of history", and the "claim to rights that have been denied [which] may involve claims to reparation or compensation" (van Schendel 2011: 25).

In international fora, the self-definition of tribal peoples as indigenous usually figures as the prime marker of indigeneity (Martínez Cobo 1987, Corry 2012). Initially, this played less of a role in the early formation of Gudalur Adivasi indigeneity, since indigeneity was

something that was externally applied by the non-tribal activists. Today, however, thanks to AMS/ACCORD's indigenisation drive, Adivasi indigenousness has been more or less internalised by the tribal peoples of the Sangam (and emulated by other Adivasi NGOs). This has reached the extent that self-identification has indeed become one of the chief characteristics of AMS/ACCORD's indigeneity rhetoric, not least because self-identification has an emancipatory and empowering ring of both communal self-determination, and personal autonomy, to it, which resonates with the more radical leanings of the actors in AMS/ACCORD's Development network.

Indigenous positionings, however, do not remain uncontested. Mosse (2005: 5), for instance, criticises the process by which IP or their NGO representatives try to attain the elusive goal of "development" by "position[ing] themselves so as to acquire rights or resources by becoming 'communities' or adopting 'indigenous' identities". Equally, van Schendel (2011: 26) asks whether,

> it [is] possible to shear 'tribe' from its connotations of primitivity, unmodernity, and colonialist and nationalist guardianship? Is it possible to re-imagine it as part of an emancipatory perspective? Does a rejection of the term 'indigenous people' imply a rejection of the dignity, citizens' rights and agency of the group concerned [one may also add humanity]?"

I therefore question whether AMS/ACCORD manage to keep indigeneity's promise of going beyond ahistorical conceptualisations of the "tribal". Are the activists, for instance, oblivious to how their indigenist rhetoric can be and is being misused? This I discuss in the second part, "Activist imaginaries of Adivasi indigeneities and their problems", of the next chapter, "Stories of chai for change?".

This, however, should not lead to the conclusion that AMS/ACCORD's indigenising narrativisation of Adivasi cultures is merely empty rhetoric. Instead, I argue that their use of indigenist rhetoric is strategic, and that it is this strategic use of the narrative of indigeneity that plays a significant facilitating role in their Development work. Since indigenist rhetoric only works in certain circles and under certain conditions, however, it has to be contextualised constantly, i.e. the indigenist content of their rhetoric adapted to context and audience. In this, the different elements of indigeneity play an important role. In AMS/ACCORD, the most prominent ones are environmental stewardship and community/family. These I now discuss in turn.

The narrative of environmental stewardship

"Nature is my ideal, my god. It never imposes ideas and nor does it exploit us. Nature is the most integral part of the Adivasi idea of self-sufficiency. Hence we Adivasis revere it more than any other thing." Vahru Sonawane (Tehelka 2010)

Fieldwork diary, 15/05/2010, Gudalur

While the appeal of stories is arguably universal across cultures, it seems the "IP as environmental guardians" is a particularly popular storyline here in Gudalur. I was struck today by the instant popularity of the film Whale Rider, which I showed as part of the teacher trainee curriculum on indigenous peoples worldwide. Even though the tribal teacher trainees' command of English was minimal at the time we first watched the film together during the first year of their two-year training programme (their English would later expand dramatically), the emotional resonance of the film was immediate and the topic of discussions for weeks after the first viewing. According to Ramdas, its message of environmental stewardship "spoke beyond words to them".

The idealisation of IP/Adivasis as ethical role models in terms of environmental and economic moral values is prominent in official AMS/ACCORD literature:

Marigan talks about sustainability (2008)

Ten, fifteen years back I had a house with a grass roof from the forest. The walls were made of bamboo. Now, my house has earth bricks and tiles. But definitely grass is better because it keeps the temperature. It is suited for our climate. It keeps us warm in the cold, and cold in the heat. But there is no way we can get grass from the forest now.

I feel definitely that solar is better than pylons. We are also thinking of a wind turbine high on the hill above the trees. Solar is also less dangerous for children. They do not get shocks from it.

The government gave me a solar light three years ago because I am a leader in the community. It burns from evening to morning. It comes on from 6 at night to 7 in the morning, and only to midnight in the monsoon. The leopard does not come near to the house now. Before, the leopard would kill the chickens and dogs.

We are very much bound with the forest because we worship nature. Now, we are thinking that we should stay and keep our ways with the forest. To hold anything (land) we have to be there. The forest department people say, "Why are you living like that? Why do not you go out and see the world?" We say, "We know the value of this life and it is our world."

We are very closely associated with nature. The air is fresh and healthy. We have clear water. There are lots of herbs in the forest. The air that we breathe has curing herbs in it, but now our people are getting more diseases. The herbs are going with the forest clearances.

It was very different when I was a child. The children were always with their parents and we learnt how to collect honey, wild fruits and herbs, meat and fish.

Nowadays, the main changes are because there are restrictions to enter the forest. So, there are no opportunities to enter. If we want bamboo from the forest we have to ask. We have to fill in forms at the forest department and wait. If we have funerals we have to get permission to collect wood for the pyres. The government policy has to change for us to keep our knowledge.

It is important to tell children about the forest. They need to go out to school but they should also know our culture. We want a school where the Adivasi language is taught until the fifth standard. We want the government to pass this law.

I can remember (recently) it raining for a whole six months without a break. We have less rain now and the heat has become more. It is affecting our cultivation. It is getting too hot.

If you take any crop, it is being lost and the patterns are changing. The monsoon comes late and it is unreliable.

Before, we only used leaves falling from the trees as a manure. Now with the trees being cut we've no (natural) fertiliser and food is not tasty like before.

In those times, people went to collect wild tubers because they were free. Now, everyone is in a hurry to get back. They just come and dig. They do not close up the hole and leave part of the root. That's why tubers are becoming less.

We do not get one lot of birds anymore, the one that waves its tail at the back, as the wild fruits are not available.

We've got forest fires coming. Many animals and birds perish. My chickens fall over sick. This was never heard of before.

Also, people from outside are coming to the forest to hunt and they do not know how.

I think its (changing weather) because of these cell-phone towers. The trees are drying around it. The leaves are brittle and fall. They have no nutrients, the weather could be changing because of this.

We worship trees, so there is no way we will cut them. Also, when there is trees it means we have water. We grow plants between trees that like shade. These are best for the health as forest people. We are all part of one.

So, the idea of cutting something to grow something else does not make sense to us. It does not apply to us.

Now we are in contact with the outside world, we want our children to be educated and have opportunities. Now, because of the AMS the fear has come down. We are no longer afraid. (ActionAid and ACCORD 2009)

The Shola Trust is an environmental conservation organisation started by Mari and Stan's son, Tarsh Thekaekara, and a group of other conservationists. They, inter alia, document Adivasis' traditional knowledge of the forest, central to which are honey gathering practices. The following story exemplifies the way the conservationists frame the debate surrounding the Forest Department's barring of access to the forest for Adivasis:

A bitter-sweet story of honey

The Kattunayakans are full of stories and beliefs like these. Some of them include practices which ensure that the tree is conserved and more bees come in the subsequent years. "When we take honey, we do not touch the smaller branches with hives. Since the branch is small, the whole of it will have to be chopped to get the comb. If we do that, the tree will lose its branch and not flourish." Many combs are left untouched on that tree-for the bears, for the birds and for the bees to come back.

We were happy and awed by Chandran's story-the magic of faith, the relationship of his people with the tree and their common sense-like conservation values. And now, enter the forest department! Not surprisingly, the huge tree with its numerous hives caught their eye. The Therpakolly people are not allowed to collect honey from their tree anymore. The tree, as the department puts it, is now a property of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. Chandran can not understand this. "The tree has hives today because of our prayers. The hives have been increasing in number because we have taken care of the tree and regulated our harvesting practices. How can the Forest Department now tell us that we cannot collect honey from it?"

Soon after the honey season began this year, Chandran noticed the hives had been harvested. No Kattunayakan from another village would do so without Chandran's permission, especially after the tragic incident. Chandran and his group looked all around the area and found a cap which belonged to the Tamil Nadu Forest Department. The forest department had beaten them to it! A penny for your thoughts? (The Shola Trust 2013)

Most of the activists' Development interventions rest on the ideology of ecological romanticism, expressed in their desire to preserve and help tribal cultures to "regenerate" and flourish. This has its historical roots in the opposition to the social and environmental ramifications of the industrial revolution. The most important aspect of 19th century romanticism was the comparison of the 'natural' world of the primitive with the 'unnatural' modern world (Prasad 2003: 27). As van Schendel (2011: 28) writes,

> [t]he discourse on 'indigenous peoples' frequently presumes them to be bearers of an alternate modernity because of the environmental sustainability imputed to 'indigenous' lifestyles. […] [T]hey are [perceived to be] alternative modern subjects who are in touch with age-old traditions that may yet save the planet. […] Unlike those who live alienated (post-)industrial lives, 'indigenous peoples' are thought still to be able to provide cultural resistance against mindless consumerism.

Next to their "special" relationship with their environment, Adivasis are by the activists imputed to have preserved traditions that concern the notions of "community" and "family". These traditions are presented as lacking in many non-Adivasi societies and therefore as worth emulating, taking tribal societies as role models.

The twin narratives of community and family

In line with AMS/ACCORD's credo of "Be the change you want to see in the world", they try to nurture such Adivasi-type notions of community and family within and for their Development network too. Stories about community values connect, and pull and keep everyone together in the network of communities, or the imagined network of communities that AMS/ACCORD is. The centrality of relationships, and the fostering of a sense of an AMS/ACCORD community and family, are emphasised at every occasion, whether this is an exchange visit to German ATP "friends", or their annual cycling fundraiser from Bangalore to Gudalur, GoMAD ("Go make a difference")[14]:

At the reception by ACCORD and the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam for the cyclists at Gudalur, the Adivasis, one after another said it was not just about the money, the fund raising - it was about relationships and a sense of community. Some snippets from the gathering and other conversations:
[…]

[14] http://madcycletours.in/ [22/11/2013]

'Society can change and become a just society only when all people become friends. This is one way - we must do more things like this so more people can become our friends'. (Marcel Thekaekara 2014)

The narrative of community unity is strong in the following story, written by Manoharan. It expresses very eloquently activists' nostalgic localisation of "valuable" tribal traditions in a (supposedly better) golden past, and their concomitant desire to revive them for the present, and preserve them for the future:

Chomara's youth gift a house to Karunakaran!

In July 2009, there were heavy rains in Gudalur valley and many houses of adivasis were heavily damaged. AMS helped the Government administration and provided relief materials to affected families.

Karunakaran's family is one such family living in the Paniya village of Chomara in Erumadu area. Their house was totally damaged by the heavy rains and they could not live there. They temporarily moved to another house in the same village. But, as the next monsoon arrived in 2010, they were worried how to cope.

The young boys of the village too talked about it. They consulted K.C.Krishnan, the AMS animator of the village. They had a bright idea – why don't we all work together for a few days and help Karunakaran's family with a house! After all, this is how adivasis used to build houses in the old days – the entire village working together to build house for any family!

It just took 7 days for the youth of Chomara village to realise their dream. They took a list of construction materials needed. They could salvage tiles and mud bricks from the old house itself. Bamboo is needed for the roof. "That, of course, we can all go to the forest and collect". One problem was window frames. The cement frames will cost money. K.C.Krishnan took responsibility to see if he could get that from the Sangam Office in Erumadu. "It costs just Rs.300 for 3 frames that we need". He came back with the news that that is arranged!

The boys and young men set out to work from the 24th April 2010 in Chomara village. The team themselves played the role of masons and workers. Walls were ready in a couple of days.

Then, as planned, they went as a group to collect Bamboo. Splitting the bamboo, making reepers and constructing the 'super structure' over the house was again a matter of one day!

As the sun shone brightly, everyone worked enthusiastically and completed the roof. The tiles from the old house were laid over the roof. Wherever there was shortage, wood and tiles were given by some others in the village too.

Karunakaran's family provided food for everyone when work was going on. There too, K.C.Krishnan gave 3 kg of rice as his contribution to support the efforts of Chomara youth.

And, within a matter of one week, Karunakaran's family got a house. "How long it would have taken if we were waiting for someone to come our rescue! But, when we tried ourselves, our unity helped give a house to one of our villagers just within a week!"
"It is a symbol of our community unity! Unity resulted in a house ... and, this house will help protect unity too!" (AMS 2010d)

A central marker of their community/family narrative is the fluidity of identity boundaries between Adivasis and non-Adivasis within the AMS/ACCORD NGO "family". As Sue Wright (1998: 9) notes, identity boundaries are by default fluid,

> As anthropologists have argued for many years (Cohen 1974, Macdonald 1993), and more recently Hall and other exponents (Morley and Chen 1996) of cultural studies in Britain have made clear, cultural identities are not inherent, bounded or static: they are dynamic, fluid and constructed situationally, in particular places and times.

Fieldwork diary, 18/05/2010, Gudalur

I am beginning to understand why I thought, when I first met Manoharan in 2007, that Manoharan was a tribal – he has what the activists refer to as a tribal nature – very self-effacing, in no way imposing. He seems to have a very different manner to everyone else; he does not want to be in charge, shuns power, gets on with things himself, is very self-sufficient and 101% reliable.

Accordingly, it was often hard to tell where the boundaries between Adivasis and non-Adivasis began and ended. This was both accidental and intentional, I argue. Inevitably, the cooperation of Adivasis and non-Adivasi NGO staff over the course of 27 years has resulted in some degree of convergence. Adivasis became NGO workers, health and education volunteers, nurses, and teachers; and activists turned indigenous (sic!). Indeed, this is how some of them characterised themselves privately, as a result of having been exposed to indigenous thinking and having worked with IP for most of their lives. As Steur (2011b: 96) perspicaciously observes, "[m]any activists know all too well from personal experience that there are shady areas where the indigenous or the tribal inextricably blends into the non-indigenous or non-tribal".

Activists conceptualised personhood itself as community and family-oriented. The individual was construed as a vehicle for the common cause all the activists were fighting for together. Reality, however, belied such official NGO thinking. In actuality, the problem of favouritism – especially concerning the immediate family members of the NGO founders – was never far in the "family-run" enterprise that AMS/ACCORD is. This became clear to me as a result of the following conflict of interest recorded during fieldwork:

Fieldwork diary, 12/05/2010, Gudalur

Mari told me about Tarsh's [one of Mari and Stan's sons] Oxford PhD research issue. Tarsh wanted to do his research on how Adivasis are protecting the forest. Mari: "These Chetans, they will kill a bison, take its leg, then leave it, like in Chief Seattle's speech, how the white

man killed the bisons just for fun." Tarsh first wanted to ascertain whether Adivasis think it would be research worth doing. Mari does not think it is necessary to ask all the time, for her it is valid research. So he thought he would ask the team first whether it would be all right. He then asked Manoharan to ask the team, but M. thought this a little odd, so now it has gone back to Stan.

Following this discussion of the two central elements of AMS/ACCORD Adivasi indigeneity narratives, I identify three further themes occurring in the activists' discourse: cultural unity, Adivasi glorification/tribal superiority, and the importance of "the story".

The narrative of cultural unity

As demonstrated in the chapter "Some opening thoughts", Gudalur is a highly heterogenous tribal region. While economic differences may not be as accentuated between the Paniya, Bettakurumba, Mullukurumba, and Kattunayakan of the Nilgiri-Wayanad region, as they are between the Toda, Kota, Badaga, and various Kurumba groups of the highly stratified and ethnically exclusive upper Nilgiri plateau tribal system (Bird-David 1994: 352), I posit that the ethnic boundaries among tribes in the Gudalur region are more pronounced than Bird-David suggests in her comparison (see the discussion in "Some opening thoughts"). This became clear to me while listening to the activists' stories of "how it used to be in the old days" (i.e. when ACCORD started out in the mid-1980s). Back then, ACCORD's efforts to blur tribal boundaries and establish an egalitarian NGO culture among Adivasis and non-Adivasis were still in their infancy, and inter-tribal differencies and hierarchies still pronounced. Today, the activists are proud of the fact that formerly common occurrences, such the Paniya refusing to sleep anywhere near the Kattunayakan in the Adivasi hospital, on account of the Paniyas' fear of the Kattunayakan's magical powers, and the Bettakurumbas' dislike of the Paniyas, are issues of the past.

This shows that activists see some idiosyncracies of tribal cultures as less worth preserving than others that carry more cultural, and therefore also material value. Inter-tribal antagonisms – as exemplified by the inter-tribal conflict previously discussed in "Case study: the 'Culture Centre'" – are one such characteristic of inter-tribal relationships the activists feel have to be overcome, in order for their Development work to be successful. We thus see a hierarchy between "good" and "less desirable" Adivasi traits in the activists' appraisal of tribal cultures. Examples for "good" characteristics attributed to Adivasis are adaptability and resilience, compared to non-Adivasis. These are values praised by the activists to the point of glorification of tribal ways of life. This serves, inter alia, the purpose of obscuring activists'

agency, and completely foregrounding that of the Adivasis' – even if this is blatantly not the case.

The narrative of Adivasi glorification and notions of tribal superiority

The activists' position is the classic Elwinian notion that "tribal values" are more humane and morally superior to the exploitative values of modern "civilised society" (Prasad 2003: 37). Examples of this kind of simultaneously othering as well as patronising glorification of Adivasis by the activists abound. This is illustrated, for instance, by the story told to me by Mari, of the AMS Adivasi leaders being the only tribal leaders among NGO leaders at the pan-South Indian Adivasi Sangamam who spoke for themselves because Stan had sufficiently trained them to analyse and discuss their situation and speak for themselves. Another example is the activists' narrative strategy of writing funding proposals from the perspective of the Adivasis themselves (cf. Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2000a). On several occasions, Stan expressed his pride in the Adivasi lantana furniture makers: "The Gudalur group is the only group that has achieved this much. The other groups are nowhere near the Gudalur Adivasis. Halfway through the six- to eight-week training programme people had already taken it up themselves." The representation of challenges as insurmountable/impossible to overcome – only then to be proven wrong by the Adivasis – is another popular representational strategy of the activists. An example for this is the story of an Adivasi woman, Nisha, on the GoMAD fundraising cycle tour, narrativised by Stan in his comments on Mari's article "Women on wheels raise money for Adivasi human rights" (Thekaekara 2014):

Another barrier removed. Another bastion conquered. Nisha leads the way as women march on (or should I say cycle on) for their rightful place in society. A place denied to them in the name of culture, tradition, even religion - and the justification that 'this is how its always been'.

But one young woman, shy of 20, picked up the gauntlet and proved that nothing is impossible. I must confess when I posed the challenge to the Adivasi women of our team in Gudalur - that we would raise funds for any women who wanted to cycle - I felt there would be no takers. But when Nisha and her companion Vasantha volunteered I wondered if it was really possible. When the cycle for them to learn and practice on arrived only a couple of weeks before the cycle ride I did not wonder any more - I was convinced it was impossible. But I had not taken into account Nisha and her 'ne'er say die attitude' and she happily proved me and many others wrong.

I asked her what helped to achieve this. Her answer was immediate - 'everyone felt I could do it and supported me even when I felt I could not'. Indeed this was very significant and speaks volumes for Adivasi society. None of the men were threatened by Nisha wanting to cycle and were in fact proud. NO one laughed or mocked. Doubted maybe as I did too. But resisted or belittled - no!

There are some lessons lurking in this simple but courageous act on the part of a young Adivasi woman. And her society.

She did herself proud. She did her community proud. She did us all proud.

What was meant to be a simple fund raising event for Adivasi rights turned out to be an assertion of women's rights. And serendipitously women's day came slap bang in the middle of the ride. Thanks to Mari for capturing this element and bringing it to everyone's notice.

A final word:

Vasantha who could not learn in time as there was only one cycle between the two of them has already signed up for the next ride and has started learning. Three other Adivasi women have asked for cycles to learn and cycle next time. Many more may join if we can organise th cycles for them. WAY TO GO - Go-Make a Difference.

Thanks Nisha. May your tribe increase.

The question arises which purpose the foregrounding of Adivasis, i.e. the reversal of development expert hierarchies, serves narratively, and whether it is actually a useful strategy. Prasad (2003: xv) argues that activists posit the moral superiority of the values they project onto a tribal past. In light of this activist tendency for temporal and cultural othering of Adivasis, I cannot help wonder whether the activists would be less disappointed at the "failure" of their cultural interventions if they started seeing Adivasis as people contemporaneous to themselves, and not exclusively as special and as their "chosen people", since rhetorically elevating them onto an imaginary pedestal sooner or later creates narrative dissonances with people's lived realities.

All the activist narratives of Adivasis described so far – indigeneity, environmental stewardship, community and family, cultural unity, and the foregrounding of Adivasi agency – are constitutive of and therefore central to the "Gudalur Adivasi story" itself, which forms the narrative backbone of AMS/ACCORD Development work. I round off this account of AMS/ACCORD's dominant narratives, and illustrate how assiduously the activists try to maintain the coherence of the "Gudalur Adivasi story", by travelling from India to the UK. In a case study from JCUK I identify the dominant theme in the discourse of the JCUK activists: the importance of having enough and right stories to tell and sell about the Gudalur Adivasis.

The narrative of "the Gudalur Adivasi story"

Fieldwork diary, 07/12/2009, Gudalur

Today Stan, having returned from a gruelling round of engagements in the UK yesterday, and back at a fundraising meeting with potential donors today, pulled off his charm campaign again with his stories. He spun his development story yarn, and – another donor on the hook. He appears to cater very well to Western expectations of what development in India should

look like – a mixture of Western enlightenment ideas sprinkled with ostensibly "culturally adapted" indigenous elements.

Case study: Just Change UK and ambivalences of "the Gudalur Adivasi story"

Fieldwork diary, 08/11/2011, Just Change UK Directors' Meeting, Oxford

Everyone strongly expressed the ambivalence of ideology and practical action – one may write about changing the world but the actual practical business of changing it is very different (and difficult). Nikki's comment was most poignant: "What am I doing importing tea, there has got to be more to this!"
Very palpable were the desire to imbue every action with an ideological underpinning, to justify ideology with action and vice versa, the need to make sense of it all and not to have just been bought for the idea by a very crafty and narratively gifted Indian development activist salesman. This is how I have heard Stan joke about it though, i.e. how he sold his ideas to gullible English development people.
People commented on the malleable and context-dependent nature of "truth" as it is handled by AMS/ACCORD. Specifically, that any adherence to one, or a unified version of "the truth", is discarded in favour if its instrumentalisation in a constantly modified form, according to the different contexts NGO staff operate in. The multiple, context-dependent ways in which key stories about the NGO's work are told and re-told, mainly by ACCORD's founders, active across different cultural spheres, are beginning to cause confusion, I sense.
One of my current explanations for this is the need for NGOs, in order to survive and thrive, to be able to reconcile and bridge the gap between often vastly disparate and conflicting contexts and interests, e.g. that of tribal people/Adivasis and international donors (ActionAid, Christian Aid, etc.). I have been criticised for this explanation by AMS/ACCORD for being too "Western", "academic", "anthropological", and out of touch with the ground realities of NGO life, where questions of right and wrong are often beside the point, or secondary to what people are trying to achieve. Does this reflect back on anthropology and its need to reassess its own claims and assumptions about right and wrong in polysemic environments, as Venkatesan and Yarrow (2012) argue in "Differentiating Development"?
I need to explore further the friction arising out of what the Indian NGO staff perceive to be the one-dimensionality of Western development models and their incommensurateness with multidimensional Indian ground actualities.

The importance of having more and better stories to tell (and trade), and the dearth/need for "success stories" (Webb 2010) in JCUK was expressed on several occasions: "But we do have an amazing story – so we must find customers who can be interested in the Just Change and Adivasi story and with whom we can build a creative relationship" (Discussion paper for national gathering 2012). JCUK activists felt they needed "a clearer story to tell about the impact on India" (22/10/12 draft minutes of a JC meeting). The "alternative is to help build an Indian business model which would give us more products, a stronger story, new people to invest, a fresh start for bringing JC vision to the UK. [We need to] acknowledge that this approach would take us away from an exclusively Adivasi focus – this is not necessarily a bad thing, as it brings more visit options, and more human interest story opportunities" (ibid.).

Fieldwork diary, 10/06/2012, Just Change Directors' Meeting, Oxford

Everyone agreed that the extra value of the tea is generated through the story (of the Adivasis) attached to it, thereby turning an ordinary into a special product. The priority has always been to sell the story rather than the tea alone. The tea is just a means to an end. "What is powerful is that we are different." The conundrum is that people are interested in the story, however, it lacks a supporting narrative structure for people to become protagonists themselves in the story through volunteering. Participation in the story is limited to those with the wherewithal (money, time, connections) to participate. There is a correlation between how well people comprehend the Adivasis' story and how "special" they think the JC tea is.

This was followed by a discussion on how to connect with and piggyback onto other like-minded organisations on the basis of the Gudalur story; and how to connect their story with that of other indigenous struggles. "We cannot keep doing the same thing."

The recruitment of inspiring people has declined – there is a need for re-motivation in the form of input from India. This, however, is hampered by a disconnect between the India and UK model of Just Change: "We [the UK] cannot replicate India. We are a consumer society." Also, "The political climate [here in the UK] has changed." Other points mentioned were the "moral dilemma" of the actual product, the tea, not really being the tea produced by the Adivasis (since they deliver their tea leaf to a shared factory from where Just Change procures the processed tea),[15] and the importance of personal investment: "People have to feel it is 'their' tea."

And ever the tensions between theory and practice, preferred tactics, forms of organisation, and the disagreements among the activists about the best practical implementation strategies mirror the considerable class and concomitant ideological differences between the different JC activists, and the frustrations with each other arising out of them:

Direct action/intervention/confrontation is favoured by the likes of seasoned community organisers such as Stan (in India) and Glen (the insurrectionists), such as the staging of protests in front of local supermarkets at Marsh Farm/their council housing estate in Luton, the placing of products in supermarkets (disruption of the script to grab people's attention with a different story about the tea they buy), and selling tea door-to-door. "You buy the tea because of its revolutionary potential; because the communities share the same concerns." (Glen)

The teaming up with similar community and fair trade organisations with a similar story is preferred by the more middle-class activists (the cooperationists) such as Nikki, Tricia, Lou (the project manager), and Sabita ("trading through collaboration rather than competition").

The conflict between the different factions in JC I would call the realists and the idealists, and the lack of internal cohesion and agreement about what JCUK is and could be, has led to gridlock.

Phillip said there are different ways of skinning the cat. One does not want to be too prescriptive in a movement. One should cast the net fairly wide to attract volunteers.

[15] Madhuvana Estate used to deliver leaf to the Paro Agro factory. The latter was very far away though which is why JCI switched to processing their tea at Chembala near Gudalur and Ganesh factories. The catch is that the tea they are marketing as Adivasi tea is not actually purely the leaf plucked by the Adivasis. The Adivasis deliver their leaf to the factory, but the finished tea is a mix of all the tea delivered from different producers in the surrounding area to Chembala). The JCUK Directors are very aware of this discrepancy in the story, but have decided to keep quiet about it in their official story, claiming it is actually tea picked purely by the Adivasis.

Sources of contention are that Glen/Marsh Farm are not delivering on their promises, resulting in a lack of confidence in them.
John emphasised that "Tea is just one aspect of Just Change. I am not the director of a tea business." This is a concern vociferously shared by Nikki too on numerous occasions, mainly because she has managed the import and distribution side of the tea trading for the past few years. Her frustration is palpable at the contradiction between her self-perception as a human rights/political activist and writer for New Internationalist, and the actual activities she finds herself doing (the commercial/trading side of JC). This she perceives to be alien to herself, but finds herself doing them anyway, out of good-will and solidarity primarily with Mari and Stan (her fellow activists with whom she shares a long personal friendship, based on numerous mutual visits to India and the UK, and Mari and Stan's son Tarsh living with Nikki and her husband Chris in Oxford while he was doing his Masters at Oxford), and, secondarily, towards the Gudalur Adivasis.
All the activists repeatedly avowed, "Who is missing is Stan!", "Stan would know what to do and how to do it." Is this an absentee leader syndrome despite autonomous organising pledges?
There is a mismatch between the different experiences of Gudalur of the different activists – a narrative disconnect between the India JC story (John especially, who lived in Gudalur for a year) and the UK JC story (Tricia in particular who is a high-profile – and also upper middle-class – UK community empowerment activist).
The constant gap between ideas/suggestions and their implementation, aspiration and action, is echoed by David Graeber (Lateu 2014), who opines, "you can look forward to a world without states and capitalism in the abstract, believe it would be better and possible, but not do anything about it. But it does not really mean much." The call to action of Feuerbach's eleventh thesis ("Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.") has to be sustained with narrative fuel, which is progressively missing in JC.
Lou: "You have to take people on a journey. You have to keep them motivated." What happens when the stories that have previously motivated people do not work any more though?
Selling the story through a cup of tea, it seems, is not enough any more.
This means key long-term activists are abandoning ship (e.g. directors stepping down) due to movement fatigue/burnout. Nikki said it is the "seven-year-itch. People want to and it is time for them to move on."
The key issue is that there are not enough active volunteers to sustain JCUK in the long run, owing in part to JCUK's volunteering "package" (read story) not being clear and therefore attractive enough.
Sabita's comments about the difficulty of accessing JC are key to understanding the problems of elitism and exclusivism pervasive both in Gudalur and the UK, and the latent conflicts between established members (Tricia) and newcomers (Sabita). In my opinion JC, and JCUK in particular, have been too elitist and incestuous. I understand their concern for safeguarding core JC ideals by preventing modifications through protecting access to the core JC group. Excessive resistance to outside influence can, however, lead to the exhaustion of the creative energies of the core members, and the forestalment of many opportunities for positive development through the careful opening up and widening of access.
Frustration encourages honesty. This was the first meeting at which the frictions and fissures that eventually led to JCUK's disbandonment in 2013 were brought into the open.
It was interesting to observe the social positioning within JCUK, according to how close the personal connections of the individual activists to Mari and Stan were. The activists' seniority, and how many, and how intimate and up-to-date the stories were they could tell of

their respective relationships with Stan and Mari, appeared to determine the internal pecking order within JCUK, i.e. the intensity of the connection was perceived to be a marker of prestige, and the weight of influence on decision-making was gauged accordingly. Such statements included, for instance, Martin's disclosure of Mari and Stan's state of health; Glen's emotional pledge of support to Stan, Chathi and the Adivasis, on the basis of his perceived class solidarity with them as the downtrodden, but resistant, represented an emphatic connection. The people who "care" the most about JCUK all have a deep-going connection to Mari and Stan in some way or another; the narrative threads inevitably lead back to them at some point in the stories of the individual activists. Mari and Stan's official disavowal of their status as the "leaders" of the movement betrays their informal designation and importance as such for the other activists.
At the end of this meeting the JCUK activists had applied what they deemed to be the "Adivasi way of decision-making": "to discuss matters until everyone was too tired to object" (Nikki).

By March 2013, as detailed even in Just Change's final report (on file with the author) to its main funder, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the growing disconnect between the UK and India was palpable, and the contradictions described above could no longer be ignored. Volunteer flow between the UK and India had all but dried up, following the end of the annual Development from the Inside course. Fewer of the stories, which had previously connected people across vast socio-economic and -cultural differences, were in circulation, owing mainly to AMS secretary Manoharan's death, AMS/ACCORD's former master storyteller. The virtual as well as real story flow via people travelling between the UK and Gudalur had dwindled to a trickle. This eventually contributed to JCUK's official decision to disband.

Fieldwork diary, 12/07/2013, JCUK directors' meeting phone in, Durham

There is always something sad about closure. But like all good things, JCUK too is coming to an end. I have been part of the 5-year tail end of JCUK. Today I felt the narrative disconnect between the UK and India quite strongly. And that everyone was running at their maximum capacity. We all seem to have and be encountering major personal and professional challenges in line with the general global climate. No one is spared, it seems. And always the emotional longing for continuity. I could hear it in everyone's voices: Nikki was realistic, but sad. Audrey was slightly alarmed at Stan's waning of revolutionary energy. Chris was frustrated and quite insistent to wind down, and ever the analyst. Tricia was wistful and still willing to invest that last bit of energy. But at the same time, all of them appeared to be quite relieved. Both that the formerly unspeakable was finally out in the open, and that we actually all agreed and were actively discussing the steps necessary for dismantling the JCUK business side, i.e. to stop importing and selling tea after the current tonne has been sold.
People mentioned so much on narrative today. The activists emphasised how a movement depends on people's sheer force of personality, such as Stan's or Glen's. There was very honest and salutary voicing of opinions. No more tiptoeing around or beating about the bush.

This may sound jejune, but everything rises and falls with the energies of people. Even for revolutionaries like Stan. I seem to be witnessing the demise of a movement. Which is its natural course in a way, unless each generation of leaders begets a new one that keeps nurturing the "revolutionary moment", as Glen put it, and continues to take things forward.
The discussion surrounding the word failure in the development sector was particularly illuminating. The line everyone agreed on was that "JCUK is not a failure, but that it is actually a miracle how it has kept going for so long."

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An audiovisual postscript

From the Darpana dance performance in Chembakolli I produced several videos that were subsequently used for the teacher trainee curriculum (a group of 17 Adivasi youngsters aged 17-18 trained from 2009 to 2011 at Vidyodaya to become primary school teachers):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2kx-FYNsfU (Darpana performance in Chembakolli)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zxy_hs1yYqY (Mullukurumba Kolkalli dance)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AHFVwIKfR8 (Mullukurumba Vattakalli dance)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dGj3fY1zzU (Kattunayakan dance)

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Interlude

The metastory, i.e. this thesis, now continues with the following chapter, "Stories of chai for change?". In this chapter, I first discuss problematic aspects of NGO socialisation in AMS/ACCORD. I then take up the two story threads of tribal self-reliance and Adivasi indigeneity from the two previous chapters, and explore their intersections, by scrutinising the different activist imaginaries of Adivasi indigeneities and their problems, and comparing them to contemporary post-indigenous tribal actualities in Gudalur. Lastly, I call into question the economics of indigeneity behind AMS/ACCORD's Development concept of indigenous self-reliance in "Chai for change = chai for development?".

STORIES OF CHAI FOR CHANGE?

"These religions are not sustainable. This world too will not survive for long if dog-eats-dog dogmatism continues. The world can build more empires and temples by snatching lives of the meek. Today, the meek are getting back at the empires – destruction, even if it costs self-destruction."
Ram Dayal Munda (Tehelka 2010)

Chapter map:

Part I

NGO and activist cultures, and their problems

Part II

Activist imaginaries of Adivasi indigeneities and their problems

Post-indigenous Adivasi realities

Adivasis reclaiming Adivasi self-representation

Part III

Chai for change = chai for development? The economics of Adivasi indigeneity narratives

Prelude

In the preceding two chapters, "Stories of Adivasi self-reliance" and "Stories of Adivasi indigeneities", I charted how AMS/ACCORD's particular brand of indigenist narrativisation has informed their strategies for economic self-reliance. I now analyse, first, in Part I, how NGO and activist cultures, and, by extension, the relationship between activist ideology and everyday, post-indigenous Adivasi experience in Gudalur and beyond, are often fraught with dissonances. This highlights the disjunctures in the conceptualisations of Adivasis, on the one hand, between Adivasis and non-Adivasis, and, on the other, between local actors (representing a movement for land and against economic exploitation), and international allies (adhering largely to the ideology of eco-romanticism).

In Part II, I take up the dominant narratives introduced in the previous chapter, and scrutinise their origins in the activists' problematic imaginaries of Adivasi personhood, and their incompatibility with post-indigenous Adivasi life realities. Consequently, I call for Adivasis to reclaim self-representation.

This, I then follow up, in Part III, with a critique of the capitalist logic behind Adivasi indigeneity narrativisation for Development ends. Incorporating this critique, I ask whether "Chai for change" in fact equals "Chai for development".

Lastly, I conclude this thesis, in Part IV, with an enquiry into whether the Chai for change story may have to be rewritten to fully take into account 21st century Adivasi intersectionality – understood as the intersection of the multiple forms of discrimination Adivasis face – in order to be able to fulfil its narrative promise to Adivasis.

To summarise, Parts I, II, and III each deal with a different aspect of the problematicness of AMS/ACCORD's marriage of Adivasi indigeneity narratives and economic self-reliance. Part I deals with the organisation and the activists themselves; Part II examines their narratives; and in Part III I am concerned with the economic aspect.

I now begin this last, analytic chapter, in Part I, with an analysis of, on the one hand, the NGO culture specific to AMS/ACCORD and, on the other, the particularities of AMS/ACCORD activists' self-conceptions and -perceptions as activists. I do this in order to show 1) what happens when individual activists' biographical trajectories and personality characteristics meet in an NGO setting, and often clash, and 2) how these influence, on the one hand, the way the activists "do" Development (which unearths tensions between activism and Development), and, on the other, how the activists, as a result of how they do Development, conceptualise the beneficiaries of their Development endeavours, i.e. the Adivasis. Part I forms the foundation for Part II on the activists' problematic imaginaries of Adivasi indigeneities and their incompatibility with post-indigenous Adivasi realities.

Part I

NGO and activist cultures, and their problems

Failed state tribal development and successful Adivasi engagements with (international) Development?

> "*[W]e should judge results not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is [sic] evolved.*"
> A favourite quote of the activists by Jawaharlal Nehru

> "*Development is not policy to be implemented, but domination to be resisted.*"
> David Mosse (2005: 5)

The dichotomy between disastrous, corruption-riddled state tribal development programmes in India, on the one hand, and NGOs as an effective antidote to this, and alternative for bringing about Adivasi development, on the other, is a popular idea among Development activists. Accordingly, in NGOs' self-representation, "the NGO [is construed] as the powerful go-between between the bad state government/multinationals and the good tribals" (Devi and

Spivak 2003: xviii). Conversely, most NGOs incur state distrust because of the issue of foreign funding. This concerns especially Christian-based organisations (which AMS/ACCORD is, despite its claims to secularity) in an increasingly right-wing Hindutva-influenced political climate (see, for instance, Froerer 2005, 2007).

Ideologically, AMS/ACCORD position themselves both in opposition to Tamil Nadu state tribal development, and at the vanguard of NGOs working with Adivasis in Tamil Nadu. In addition to this, AMS/ACCORD are a vocal critic of international Development. Their main point of criticism concerning Development is the arbitrary nature of decision-making on "development" projects in India, and, in particular, attempts to replicate what is seen in other countries, without considering whether the solution is suitable for local Indian contexts. Both of AMS/ACCORD's founders are avowed admirers of the works and approach of Verrier Elwin.[16] Accordingly, their approach is in line with Nehru's statement that "'we should judge results not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is evolved [sic]'" (Elwin 1963: i). AMS/ACCORD's chief Development principle is therefore one of incorporating what they believe to be an Adivasi ethos into the day-to-day workings of the organisation. Correspondingly, AMS/ACCORD's philosophy has from the beginning been to identify enthusiastic young members from the tribal community itself – ideally from all five tribal communities federated under the AMS – and to train them to deliver all the services required by the community, present and future. Judging by the number of young Adivasi people trained, and the scope of their professions, AMS/ACCORD appear to have been more successful in this than most other NGOs engaged in tribal development in Tamil Nadu.

Ultimately though, as lamented constantly by the AMS/ACCORD activists, NGOs such as AMS/ACCORD always come up against the central contradiction characterising their work – the conflict between their self-reliance ethos and external funding dependency. In the process, activists' idealism often gives way to resignation, and activism is sacrificed for Development. This is emblematic of the strained relationship between activism and Development.

An uneasy relationship between Development and activism

Fieldwork diary, 28/10/2009, Gudalur

[16] Specifically, the activists referred most often to his work as a member of the Dhebar Commission instituted on 28 April 1960 to investigate the administration of the Scheduled Areas and the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in the States, ten years after the adoption of the Constitution, and to his summary of the Commission's 756-page report, "A New Deal for Tribal India".

The core of the activists (the original founders and their families) are a very close-knit community, preferring to keep to themselves, i.e. among Indians. Only those trusted are put in positions of power. They look down upon those who do not adapt, and seem to hold a special grudge against or have had negative experiences with "those NRIs". Nobody is free of prejudices.
The permanent staff's frustration with volunteers is palpable. Manoharan gets really annoyed if he has to clear up after people who are only here for a short time. Once, Shyla employed someone to do a database. According to Mari he was a nice guy, but he could not cope, so M. had to redo the whole thing after he left. I am realising more and more how important they consider it to recruit people they know, ideally from within one of their families.
Durga cannot deal with people who do not come here to work, but to escape problems back home. According to her, people should not come to Gudalur if they need constant reassurance or praise or gratification. Nobody seems to think very highly of L., a lady who was here until the beginning of October, because she was allegedly very demanding, thereby placing a burden on people. Self-sufficiency is valued very highly. Dependence is looked down upon. One should only consider do-gooding if one's intention is to work, not to overcome personal problems.

To explain NGO socialisation, it is helpful to draw on a framing approach. Frames are a schema of interpretation, i.e. a cultural filter through which people interpret and evaluate. Accordingly, one can analyse how people internalise NGO ideology or activist dogma, often to such an extent after a certain time that it becomes invisible and thus unquestioned. Of particular interest to me was how thorough the adherence to these frames in AMS/ACCORD was. One of the faultlines where this surfaced was the tension between Development work (often spoken of as a "necessary evil" by some the activists) and "pure" activism (preferred as the "ideal" by other activists). Right from the beginning, AMS/ACCORD activists' work was characterised by the ambivalent and uneasy relationship between Development and activism:

From the point of view of development dogma, hospitals and schools were absolutely NOT politically correct. And according to the gospel of the activist they were an anathema. Yet the people were demanding it. (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2002)

"Development" was seen by the activists to be parasitic on activism:

This gave rise to development programmes. We were agonisingly aware of the fact that development programmes ate cancerously into activism. But there did not seem to be any alternatives.

Suddenly the animators seemed to be working almost as if they were extension agents of the government. This had a plus and minus side. On the one hand, our aim was to get people to a position where they could demand and access government schemes. But on the other, the heavy development burden took away from the activist work. And the tension of walking the tightrope between activism and development was further heightened.

All this meant that suddenly we were more than just a small group of activists trying to create awareness. We were slowly emerging into a multi-disciplinary group with all sorts of activities and programmes. And with this came new kinds of problems – much larger funding, organisational structures, management skills, infrastructure etc. (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2000a)

In reality, what the activists considered real activism ended up being a tiny proportion of their actual work. In AMS/ACCORD, the latter would on a daily basis more likely include, for instance, the verification of forest claims under the new Forest Rights Act, the move to obtain birth certificates for all Adivasi children going to school, the establishment of a nursery for indigenous plant species, or the daily administrative hassle of appeasing international donor agencies such as Christian Aid, who, much to everyone's annoyance in AMS/ACCORD, changed their reporting requirements from half-yearly to quarterly when I was in Gudalur.

In Viennie's (of TAF) opinion too, NGOs waste too much time with meetings and trainings. In his opinion, NGO staff should instead go out to the villages and directly talk to the people – in his words "simply be with them".

In "Cultivating development", Mosse (2005: 9) argues that "successful" translation between policy and stakeholders' interests, and vice versa, requires, "brokers" who are able to negotiate different agendas and translate them into the respective interested parties' languages. Activists such as Stan and Viennie are such brokers for Adivasi movements, translating between the latter and donors, other interested parties, and civil society groups, negotiating boundaries, enabling and restricting access to Adivasis, and "translating" the "outside world" to Adivasis. Officially, however, these roles ascribed to the activists are renounced by them and they express vocal discomfort at being identified as development brokers. The term "Development activist" I use here in this thesis, to represent the particular intersection of activism and Development work in AMS/ACCORD, is thus an uneasy conceptual marriage.

Interestingly, AMS/ACCORD activists' uneasiness with being perceived as having made a windfall off development aid money, and their constant asseverations that their relative affluence is thanks to wealthier relatives' support, donations, persistent hard work, strategically advantageous alliances with funding bodies, and the constant affirmation and display of (mostly very personal) connections with powerful people (mostly international), is in contrast with the almost diametrically opposed trend observed for some Adivasis. As Steur (2011a: 73) concurs, Adivasis were instead often proud that "finally one of us is also getting

rich". This, she argues, represents a form of Adivasi "resistance against the language of the Left that constantly emphasised their pathetic condition" (ibid.).

Another tension between activism and Development was expressed by Gail Coelho, a Bettakurumba linguist at Delhi University (Coelho 2003), who I met during a social occasion in Gudalur. For her, G.N. Devy, founder of the Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh, was a visionary and dreamer, but at the same time someone who made too many claims and promises he could not keep. Yet, this kind of visionary vanguardism is constitutive of the social activism of the Gudalur activists.

Vanguardism or a philosophy of perpetual change

Fieldwork diary, 01/11/09, Gudalur

A selection of the diversity of ACCORD/AMS/JC projects, ongoing and in the pipeline: a WWF-funded NTFP (non-timber forest products) production nursery, a tree nursery (for fodder, firewood, etc.), the filing of FRA claims, GPS-assisted land mapping, the development of investor models for JC, a community currency and bank, the interactive centre for indigenous cultures, ongoing protests – most recently against the arson of a Kuttunayakan family's house on the Mayfield Estate, the chembakolli.com livestream and ongoing blog, a solar project for the hospital and tea estate village through ATP with solar panels from Germany (maybe after January – not on the company's priority list because it is not a "big" project); so far there is no electricity there and the place is quite remote; this is supposed to create an incentive for families to move there.

Movement organising techniques often run the danger of becoming calcified very quickly – as in "this has worked before, this is why we will continue to do it this way, as long as it works". In order to keep the momentum of a social movement going, however, its members have to keep changing the goalposts and tweaking their methods, even if they work (which, on the other hand, can quickly become overly capitalist-managerialist – a fact lamented, for instance, by the AMS/ACCORD activists). Accordingly, activists have to anticipate and build constant change into everything they do. Flynn (2013: 2) similarly observes that "[a]ware of such gloomy predictions, leaderships of SMOs that can be said to have 'attained' a degree of institutionalisation can become preoccupied with processes of conscious evolution to remain relevant", and that it is "through this evolution of purpose and willingness to tackle new objectives that the movement [the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, or MST, Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement] has managed to survive for over 30 years".

AMS/ACCORD therefore follow the creed of prefigurative politics (Boggs 1977), i.e. of "being the change they want to see in the world". Analysing this "continual improvement" narrative with regard to AMS/ACCORD, I suggest, however, that its actual purpose is, in fact,

to prevent the (full) achievement of these improvements, in order to keep the momentum going, by way of aspiring to a kind of perpetuum mobile-type mobilising strategy. I developed this impression particularly in relation to the activists' dominant narrative of "withdrawal-of-non-Adivasi-project-initiators-after-ten-years". Inevitably, something would happen that necessitated and justified the activists' continued presence (an economic crisis, a natural disaster, etc.), way beyond the ten years, to the point where their actual physical withdrawal was both practically and emotionally very unlikely, and in fact impossible, because by this time their life, work, and personal livelihood basis had become inextricably tied to the project area (I am talking about a time frame of 30+ years).

In line with AMS/ACCORD's aspiration to always be at the vanguard of the Development sector is another characteristic of AMS/ACCORD's activist culture: their spurning, inversion, and active moulding of conventional Development wisdom.

Irreverence for conventional wisdom

Activist rationale is the triumph of hope over experience. Activists portray themselves as romantics, willing to try everything and wing it. The "battles" the "old activist warriors" such as Stan are fighting appear quixotic today. Yet for them anything is preferable to a resignation to capitalist exploitation. Their credo is, "Before the battle is over, many a little battle has to be fought". Correspondingly, AMS/ACCORD's approach is informed by a notion of elitism, exclusivity, and selectiveness, i.e. that they represent the apex of South Indian NGOs. This goes hand in hand with building a reputation as mavericks, and thereby attracting the people they want to have work for them. This approach favoured by the activists is expressed by what Sachs (2012b) calls "creative non-conformism: "More deeply, we find a moral deeply contradictory to the dark art: creative non-conformists will rule the world. And at its core, we find the values of self-realization and creativity."

Activist organisations are by definition partisan and opinionated. Activists see the world through a particular lens, although they loathe to be accused of parochialism or provincialism. An oft-neglected element in such positioning, either because it is taken-for-granted or consciously disregarded, is the personal charisma of NGO leaders.

The role of the personal charisma of NGO leaders

Stan's work in a tribal village

In 1974, Stan, fresh out of university and quite wet behind the ears marched into a tribal village in rural Bihar carrying little less than a mix of Marxian analysis and liberation theology. Unjust economic structures had to be changed, wealth re-distributed, poverty

eradicated. The revolution seemed to be lurking around the corner. (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2000b)

The attribution of differing levels of charisma to NGO leaders (such as Stan) in particular, is something I encountered frequently in the field, both in India as well as the UK. As an amorphous character trait, people found it hard to define though, when I asked them what they meant by it. Charisma was an attribute people seemed to either possess, or not. People were unanimous though in their judgement of its importance for the success of inter-personal relationships, the key currency of Development work. Correspondingly, "leadership" (a loan-concept from the world of capitalist managerialism) was something NGOs perceived Adivasis to be lacking, and thus tried to nurture in Adivasis. In the following fieldnote I compare the differential charisma of three NGO leaders I came to know well: Stan, Viennie, and Vincent.

Fieldwork diary, 14/09/2009, TAF (Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation) meeting, Trichy

If I compare Stan (of AMS/ACCORD), and Viennie and Vincent (of TAF), who all share the more or less similar goal of changing this world to a more socially just place, i.e. changing the unjust current economic system, and at the same time helping those most in need, with more or less sophisticated strategies and methods, but with the same passion, determination, doggedness and endurance, to the point of being at the cost of one's own well-being and health, I cannot help wonder what their individual recipes for success or failure are.
All three of them are change-makers par excellence, always bursting with new ideas (maybe not staying on long enough and moving on too fast in Vincent's case) for organising, training, educating people and changing their lot for the better. While Viennie prefers to remain behind the curtain and stay out of the limelight (and is clearly uncomfortable speaking publicly in front of an audience he does not know), Stan is the personified performer, never hesitant to take to the stage, preferably centre-stage, and take over the show – the puppeteer in complete command of the myriad of puppets' strings in his hand. While Viennie exudes what may be called quiet charm, Stan is essentialised charisma, and Vincent youthful exuberance in person (maybe with all its trappings of being too rash, wanting to do things too quickly without stopping to think). Then again it needs a combination of people like Viennie and Vincent, and their other friend from the seminary days in Chennai. He has been a lawyer in the High Court for many years and has been fighting for justice in his own realm, taking on cases free of charge for STs and SCs – especially under the Atrocities Act – and filing writ petitions against more powerful upper-caste entities.
So the latter three, as the first two were telling me in the evening of the meeting day, when it had finally cooled and calmed down and everyone had left, are planning to set up a separate organisation offering legal training and workshops to STs because they fear that TAF, once TRED pulls out and the Mani Tese funding ceases, may be taken over by less Adivasi empowerment-minded forces and disintegrate, like so many of its predecessors before. What it needs is clear Adivasi leadership, someone who can hold the organisation together and who does not work for his/her own vested interests or the furtherance of his/her own power. I wonder though whether Balan, the designated leader for TAF, might not be too soft-spoken

for this because Sundaram, the treasurer, completely dominated the discussions at the meeting today – he was clearly the best-informed and the rhetorically most gifted speaker.

Undoubtedly, there exists a personality cult surrounding Mari and Stan (which is evidenced not only by Stan's use of magic tricks in his storytelling!). This, however, is (uncomfortably) denied by all the activists, first and foremost Stan and Mari themselves. Interestingly, other activists acknowledge it though. In the draft minutes of a JCUK meeting from 22/10/2012 it said the following, for instance: "HK business school met with Adivasis – the latter had a much stronger business sense. Shows it has a core not reliant on Stan's charisma/ACCORD expertise". In the final minutes, however, the above was changed to, "Showed that JCI has a core of members who understand and are committed to the economic ambitions of JC and that the participative capital idea is really important to them." Charisma then is an "undesirable desideratum" – vital for the activists' work, but preferably not acknowledged.

The following extract shows how Mari and Stan, as an example for NGO leaders, prefer to think of themselves:

To the rest of the world, all of us were dubbed 'social workers', but in the seventies, influenced by radical thinkers, we saw our role as enabling the poor to fight for their rights, to fight systemic injustice, not merely doing charitable work. So the basis of our work was social justice – a fine but important distinction that is difficult to explain in a mere blog. In the millennium, the term 'Human Rights defenders' evolved. We were not 'doing things' for the poor, we were helping them fight for their rights to education, food, health and a decent livelihood. We considered it an insult to be told we were charity workers.

The NGO world (like ours) is not perfect. You will find people heading projects with megalomania, ambition, with king-size egos. Most iconic leaders have feet of clay. Bill Clinton had predecessors. Martin Luther King and Kennedy lived in times when the media did not do exposes. Gandhiji, if he lived in the 21st century, now would be in jail for sleeping almost naked between virgins, experiments with truth, my eye. Even idols must have weak spots if they are human. There may be corruption in some quarters and mismanagement and squandering of resources in others. These people are not saints. (Marcel Thekaekara 2013a)

These self-avowals of humility and fallability are connected to another key ideological trait of NGO work: the endorsement of dematerialisation, renunciation, and (voluntary) simplicity. In this, the activists again claim to be modelling themselves on core Adivasi values.

Dematerialisation and the negation of needs

Fieldwork diary, 26/05/2010, Gudalur

Is it the same everywhere in the NGO sector? Women worrying about their husbands taking on too many responsibilities? Failing health? Opportunistic and freeloading behaviour by other people and the government? People demanding better and better education, but unwilling to pay the fees?

There is certainly an element of renunciation and even martyrdom to Development activism. This is the conviction and willingness to sacrifice – if not one's existence – then at least one's wellbeing in the service of the people one has dedicated one's life to. Once chosen, this path does not allow half measures in terms of commitment. Interestingly, this effacement of the self by development workers belies the centrality of personality (and charisma, as described above) to the quality of development interactions, and how centrally the individual biographies of the activists shape the trajectories of their activism.

Personal sacrifice was one of a set of high moral standards the AMS/ACCORD activists set for themselves. It formed part of an entire catalogue of desirable and undesirable personality traits (on the latter see the fieldnote of 28/10/2009 at the beginning of this sub-chapter). Someone who uncontestedly embodied all of AMS/ACCORD's moral standards – in fact, set them for others by his example – was the organisation's former secretary, Manoharan, who tragically died of cancer in 2012. Stan's eulogy (27/02/2012) expresses best Manoharan's personal standard of the negation of the individual self in the service of the collective:

My son Tariq just said of Manoharan, "he was something else – really saintly". Saintly, indeed he was and much much more. It took me a long time to figure him out and accept that what you saw was what you got. No guile, no subterfuge, in fact no ego whatsoever. He gave without asking or expecting anything in return. He was to everybody whatever they needed him to be. Always shying away and staying in the background but always a pillar of strength and support.

I console myself with the thought that even if life were to be measured only by the hours lived, Manoharan has had a long life – while all of us were asleep he would be working away - often 16 hours a day! If life is measured by the people whose lives you have touched, he had lived to a ripe old age - for he touched the lives of more people in his one short lifetime than many will in two lifetimes. If life is measured by the good you have done - he has lived many times over. His life was nothing but goodness. To the very end he was more concerned about not troubling others and masked whatever pain he was enduring so as not to upset those around him.

I met him last on Sunday morning before I left to Bangalore - two of his closest friends Nikilesh and Sajan were there and no matter what we said he used all his energy to smile at us. That is what I will remember him by – his affectionate smile for everyone.

In all that he has done for so very many people, in the high moral standards he set for us all, Manoharan will always live on - a beacon of selflessness. A man like no other.

Even though such values distinctly originate in a Christianity-dominated belief system in AMS/ACCORD, the activists were keen to compare themselves with Adivasis in their lifestyles, even though the two could not be further apart most of the time. Again, this is relative though. From an urban middle-class perspective, the activists certainly lived a lifestyle more akin to Adivasis. From most Adivasis' perspective, this was certainly not the case. I do not wish to engage in the naming and shaming of activists' lifestyles here though. What I do wonder, however, is whether this type of supposed emulation of tribal ways of life is another instance of the blurring of ethnic boundaries between non-Adivasis and Adivasis, discussed previously. In relation to this debate, Steur (2011a: 62) testifies to a different reason why the supposed tribal simplicity and frugality activists are keen to model their behaviour on is a misconception:

> When she [C.K. Janu, the leader of the Adivasi Gothra Mahasaba in Kerala] attacks the consumerism of the Malayalee middle-class, she makes it clear this is a general social critique and not a justification for tribal poverty through the myth of their supposed 'simple needs'".

What activists were equally fond of was to emphasise their introduction of egalitarian relations, i.e. of creating an egalitarian NGO utopia amid an otherwise brutally hierarchically organised caste society. Mari, for instance, never tired of mentioning that, in order to overcome social hierarchies, Stan and Mari used to sweep the floor. What I observed instead though, during my fieldwork, was the impossibility of erasing caste lines (that are mostly invisible and therefore hard to challenge), no matter how liberal and progressive an environment the activists were trying to create.

Often though, the avowal of the moral standards described above developed into a "holier-than-thou" attitude. Most often, AMS/ACCORD activists would achieve this through comparing themselves to, and in the process elevating themselves above other NGOs or the government. Interestingly, one of the ways they did this was to develop a particular way of dealing with criticism, a business NGOs are engaged in by default.

Engagement with criticism

NGOs constantly have to respond to criticism. Particularly rife in the NGO sector are mutual accusations of corruption:

Fieldwork diary, 29/05/2010, Bavani

Had a very interesting conversation on the bus today with Chitra, about corruption in NGOs. According to her, Viennie and Fr Tony are the only sincere ones. She said even Mercy of Crutch in Mettupalayam has been using Sabina's money for personal expenses.

An interesting occurrence at the South India-wide Adivasi Sangamam in the 1990s, as retold by Mari, illustrates this for AMS/ACCORD. Mananthavady in Kerala was deemed to be a problematic place to hold the Sangamam because Kerala is so politically charged. Siddharth, an NGO leader running a place in Bangalore (he and Stan have known each other since kindergarten days) was told Stan had foreign funding. Conversely, Stan was told Siddharth was receiving foreign funding. According to Mari, their mutual mirth was great when they learned of the similar nature of the accusations levelled against them [N.B. AMS/ACCORD was receiving foreign funding at the time]. Steur (2011a: 68) identifies for the AGMS, Kerala's Adivasi movement, accusations similar to those levelled against AMS/ACCORD (although there is otherwise little basis for comparison because one is a political movement, the other an NGO). This is the familiar charge of foreign fund manipulation and getting rich over the backs of poor Adivasis. She writes that "[i]n practice, almost all Dalit as well as adivasi organizations are considered sectarian and stigmatized as 'foreign-funded'" (Steur 2011a: 70).

Mari once complained about the "wrong attitude" of Chettans (Malayalee settlers). According to her, Chettans tend to look down on tribals. They have, for instance, asked Stan and Mari in the past why they are still working with tribals after all these years, when other people (other than Adivasis) might have become more developed by now.

These kind of sceptical voices and negative reporting have to be controlled by NGOs, by either taking the positive reporting in their own hands (the activists') or silencing the naysayers. This is a delicate balance between engaging constructively with criticism, and turning it into opportunities for revision and renewal, on the one hand, and becoming indifferent and eventually impervious to criticism, on the other. As much as possible though, in an attempt to retain narrative control of events, the activists always try to decide for themselves which criticism is worth engaging with, and which is not. Contrary to official (re)presentation, this leads to a highly selective, instead of a more or less objective evaluation process, thereby establishing and (re)enforcing slightly autocratic tendencies on the part of the activists.

What impressed me in the beginning (in my naïvety), was that AMS/ACCORD appeared to be quite demonstratively self-reflective and -reflexive, even to the point of feeding their

insights back into the policy level (for instance, at Oxfam, Christian Aid, and ActionAid). I then, however, realised that the self-reflexivity and -reflectivity rhetoric was often a whitewash for actual cluelessness or a blame game on other organisations, which they perceived not to be as advanced as themselves. At the same time, they explained their "questioning the development rhetoric" stance as an earnest strategy at self-improvement. The rationale behind this was that they hardly ever knew beforehand what would work out and what not. To pass off uncertainty as certainty would always backfire. They thus saw self-reflectivity as a necessity for survival, pre-planned into the project cycle as a positive feedback loop, rather than as an afterthought, thereby affirming the emergent/fluid character of Development work.

The activists were painfully aware that funding exigencies often turned their well-crafted critical stance on both Development and anti-Development camps into a caricature. They were constantly afraid of being called out as hypocrites, which, sadly and ironically, at times ran the danger of turning their words into those of ianus-faced ventriloquists on the Development stage, who ended up personating too many voices and wearing too many hats simultaneously.

Apart from these external challenges, AMS/ACCORD had to deal with systemic internal challenges.

Challenges – internal divisions, communication breakdowns, and institutionalisation

"You know, this is Gudalur. Everything goes very slow here."
Mari Thekaekara, conversation, 11/04/2011

Fieldwork diary, 07/04/2010, Gudalur

Stan's idea is to have a three-month introductory programme for new members of AMS/ACCORD, i.e. to induct them in all the different sectors, after which they decide where they want to work. Their philosophy is to expose everyone to everything, turning AMS/ACCORD into one big family. This, however, is hampered by Shyla who says there is no time. Mari thinks one of the problems is that those with specialised knowledge think that everything else is just common sense. Decentralisation and institutionalisation, i.e. the breaking up of AMS/ACCORD into different sectors, are big issues on everyone's minds.

Fieldwork diary, 18/05/2010, Gudalur

Had a long conversation with Durga about the school (Vidyodaya) today. Durga has always been around, managing the school from when she was 22. Then Rama & Ramdas, the school's original founders, went away. When they came back, Rama would complain about everything Durga had implemented and change it all again. Most importantly though, according to Durga, she would cut everyone else's ideas off, but then suggest them herself

next term. She's really frustrated with Rama and her almost absolute rule in school. Durga now refuses to go to the teachers' meetings because she thinks they are a waste of time. The current teachers are not going beyond themselves because they feel all they have to do is fulfil targets. They feel they do not have a stake in decisions or in the development of the curriculum, for instance. Also, despite their credo that tribals should be doing everything themselves and should be in charge, a reversal of this is taking place now, e.g. they are hiring non-tribals as teachers again. Is this because the original founder development activist couples are getting old now and it takes a lot more time until a cadre of tribals has been trained to take over the organisation from them? Are 24 years not enough? Or are many of the tribals they have trained in fact moving on with the times and are seeking better economic opportunities outside the constraints of NGO work?

The main problems I observed in AMS/ACCORD were a slightly authoritarian governing and management style, a lack of communication and understanding, activists' very personal grievances against each other, and even outright hostility between the leaders of the different AMS/ACCORD branches.

Over the years, AMS/ACCORD have undergone a process of institutionalisation, echoed by Tilche (2011: 57) for the Adivasi Academy in Gujarat. The resulting increase in the organisation's operational complexity has caused the stricter demarcation between the organisation's different institutions (the hospital, school, JC, Madhuvana, etc.), in terms of funding and administration. This, according to Stan, has increasingly restricted AMS/ACCORD's activities. At the same time, it has engendered the blurring of conceptual boundaries between AMS/ACCORD as an NGO, a community organisation, and a movement. Stan, for instance, remarked at a meeting that they needed to further cohesion at the area level because the area teams had become too specialised on either health or education, and needed to work together again. Furthermore, fragmentation through decentralisation has led to relations among AMS/ACCORD staff becoming toxic, leading to internal rifts. This was visible not only in India, but also in JCUK:

Fieldwork diary, 12/05/2010, Gudalur

Mari mentioned some intriguing class dynamics in JCUK I had not considered – the Marsh Farmers (Luton council estate) always complain about the "toffs" (Tricia etc.). There is a completely different atmosphere when the latter are not around. In her characteristically critical way, Mari complained that the MF people smoke weed every day. Mari does not have as much faith in them as Stan. They have been talking about doing door-to-door tea marketing for three years. It has not gotten off the ground yet. I wonder then, if class is such a dividing element, how do activists from different social backgrounds in the UK bond? Is it chiefly through the exchange of Adivasi narratives?

*

This first part on conflictual NGO and activist cultures, and the Development activists' contradictory subjectivities, now segues into Part II on the activists' problematic imaginaries of Adivasi personhood. Here I enlarge on the activist Adivasi indigeneity narratives introduced in the section "Dominant activist narratives and narrative strategies" in the previous chapter, and analyse their incompatibility with post-indigenous Adivasi life realities. I end this second part with a call for Adivasis to reclaim self-representation.

Part II

Activist imaginaries of Adivasi indigeneities and their problems

In this second part, I analyse AMS/ACCORD activists' central Adivasi indigeneity imaginaries: the Adivasi as the 1) culture hero(ine), 2) the indigenous paragon, 3) the eco-activist ambassador, 4) the organic intellectual, 5) the anti-secular, postmodern Adivasi, and 6) the Christian Adivasi.

The imaginary of the Adivasi culture hero(ine)

This is the activist imaginary that produces the activist narrative of Adivasi glorification and Adivasi superiority described in the previous chapter. The central motif around which this imaginary revolves is that of the "hero(ine)'s journey". Connected to the portrayal of Adivasis as culture heroes is the activists' narrative of tribal ownership. As I suggest, however, heroic positionings of Adivasis often end up being a case of imagined revolutionary agency.

The "hero[ine]'s journey" in activists' storytelling about Adivasis

Fieldwork diary, 29/03/2010, Gudalur

A workshop on dreams conducted by Stan for the Vidyodaya kids

Stan: "It is very important to have a dream. Then you feel like doing more. Otherwise you are a coolie in the field."
The aim of this workshop was to teach Adivasi children aspirational thinking. First, Stan asked the children what their own dreams are, then what their dreams for others/their villages are. He then introduced different people with different dreams, and asked the children what they thought the differences between them are.
These people were: 1) Gandhiji, who had a dream for an entire country, i.e. to be free of the British; 2) Mother Theresa; 3) Subhash Chandra Bose (for him Stan got the picture wrong; interestingly, Veena, a non-tribal teacher, knew he got it wrong, but did not correct him); 4) Ambedkar; 5) Birsa Munda: he had a more specific dream – he fought the British before all others; he wanted the Adivasis to manage themselves; this, however, has not yet come true; 6) Nelson Mandela: he made his dream the dream of many people; 7) Abraham Lincoln; 8) Aishwarya Rai: she had a dream only for herself, at which everyone, by now catching on to

Stan's line of reasoning, burst into derisive laughter; 9) Adolf Hitler: he was a "michakaran" (villain), his dream was for Aryan people only (What is the difference of his dream to that of others? Answer: it was good only for some people, and bad for others.); 10) Martin Luther King: for him Stan chose the line about the colour of skin/character from MLK's 'I have a dream' speech; MLK shared his dream with the whole world; 11) Daniel, the cyclist who recently cycled all the way from London to Gudalur. He had a dream for himself, but also for others. He is a person like you and me. When did he have his dream? When he was little, 11-12. He said he wanted to cycle to India; 13) Karunanidi, Chief Minister of TN: he had a dream only for himself, and then his son, to be CM. This is very selfish.
Stan then proceeded to ask the children different questions: Do you study for yourself or for others? What do you want to be? A doctor – to help others. Do you want a job that makes you rich or to help others? What is better? Money or family? How do you know when money is enough? You have to have a dream for yourself, your family, your village, your community. Who do you want to be like? Gandhi
Stan: "My dream is for all Adivasis to be free. If I have a dream, what must I do for it to become true? Do not sit and dream, but work on it to become true. You must never forget your dream. Keep your dream. Follow it. Chase it. Dream the 'Impossible Dream' [Stan's favourite song]."

Activist narratives about Adivasis make use of the classic narrative device of the "hero's (or heroine's) journey", or monomyth, as Campbell (1949) termed it. Sachs (2012a) describes this motif as follows:

> Acting much in the way myths have for millennia, this approach builds stories that point out the possibility for human growth and even transcendence. […] They inspire action by painting a picture of an imperfect world that can be repaired through heroic action. And most importantly, they create deep affinity by acknowledging that human beings can be something more than selfish machines seeking status, sex, comfort, and convenience.

As Sachs (2012b) further notes, "People are programmed to believe in heroism, and, as Christopher Vogler notes in his classic text on mythic structure in movies: 'Sacrifice is the Hero's willingness to give up something of value, perhaps even her own life, on behalf of an ideal or group'". It is stories such as "Chorian's Stand" (introduced at the beginning of this thesis) that exemplify activists' narrativisation of events spearheaded by Adivasi "hero(ine)s" that became the founding myths of AMS/ACCORD's land rights "revolution".

The contradiction in the representation of Adivasis as protagonists in "hero(ine)'s journeys", however, is that it casts Adivasis in roles previously hardly existent in their societies. Firstly, as revolutionaries spearheading a movement to reclaim land; secondly, as claimants and therefore owners of "their" land that they previously had a non-materialistic relationship with; and, thirdly, as individual claimants of such land rights – an idea at odds with the collective ethos of most tribal societies. As a result, activists' telos of tribal ownership – i.e. for Adivasis to become both land owners and to eventually completely take

over the running of AMS/ACCORD – at the end and as a result of Adivasis' "hero(ine)s' journeys" – exhibits certain problems.

The narrative of tribal ownership

If we were able to develop the hospital as an institution that would be owned and controlled by the tribal community then perhaps this would increase their bargaining power with other more powerful communities in the area. […] *The challenge was to develop the institution in a way that it would actually be owned and controlled by the people. We discussed the idea at length. The means by which an institution like the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital could help empower people locally. Here too, we decided on a policy that only tribals would be employed and trained so that they could run the hospital on a day to day basis."* (Thekaekara and Marcel Thekaekara 2002)

Fieldwork diary, 27/04/2010, Gudalur

Mari today catastrophised (talking about AMS/ACCORD) that it is all falling apart; that it is all disintegrating; that their dream of having only tribals work in the organisation is not coming true. People like Shyla (one of the co-founders of the hospital) are hiring too many people from outside. According to Mari, people such as Jiji and Nrttina should not work for ACCORD. Paying volunteers (such as the UK and US medical students) from abroad appear to be tolerated though. Is this really only about the "dominating Indians"? According to Mari, Jiji was dominating some of the discussions they were having amongst the tribal health workers (especially Malayalees are seen to be dominating).

Fieldwork diary, 23/04/2010, Gudalur

According to the activists, one has to be able to understand the tribal way of working, as they do not work according to our logic and work culture. This is where I see big discrepancies in the way the activists portray their ethos on the website and in proposals for international funding agencies, for instance, and the reality on the ground. According to some of the activists, tribals cannot be left to decide about important matters if they are not knowledgeable about them. But then rather a lot ends up in non-tribal hands to decide.

The central incongruity surrounding the narrative of tribal ownership in AMS/ACCORD revolves around the gap between, on the one hand, some of the activists' (mainly Mari and Stan's) aspiration for Adivasis to eventually be able to take over all aspects of AMS/ACCORD, and thus claim ownership of "their" organisation, and, on the other hand, the reality that this is simply not the case and that other activists' continue to hire "outsiders", on the basis of what they deem to be their more "realistic" assessment that tribals are "not ready for it yet". Tribal ownership has thus taken on the nature of a mythical ideal that will – most likely – never be achieved fully. Bumiller (1990: 143) identifies a similar problem for SEWA (India's Self-employed Women's Association):

> After much internal debate and some resistance, SEWA had brought in committed professionals from the outside, all of them women, to manage the cooperatives, the bank and the union activities. This ran counter to the organisations's philosophy of bringing people up from the bottom.

Flynn (2013: 11) describes a notion among MST activists similar to the one some of the Gudalur activists hold about Adivasis – that they first need to be "educated" in the "proper" way to fulfil the NGO targets that will lead to greater Adivasi economic self-reliance. Flynn writes that,

> [a]mong others, both Paulo and Cleiton were supporters of cooperativisation and believed that the main factor behind the base's rejection of the programme following June 1990 and indeed its continuing apathy was a lack of *formação política*, the idea that members needed to be better educated about the benefits that such a model could bring.

In AMS/ACCORD I thus found two conflicting notions concerning tribal ownership – often held by the same person: on the one hand, that tribals should take over, but, on the other, that they were not (yet) able to do so. These, I argue, are two sides of the same coin of an – even if well-intentioned – patronising view of Adivasis specific to NGOs. Much of NGO culture is an exercise in and of power over others – the more emphatically this is denied by NGOs, the more this seems to be the case. Wanting to "protect" Adivasis from the "outside world", to "help" them "enter the mainstream on their own terms", "with heads held high", can point to a deep-seated patronising attitude pervasive in NGO culture. This, I argue, is an extension of, at first, the colonial "white man's burden" (without wanting to go into a discussion here about the obviously unilaterally gendered nature of this burden), and then the "Indians over other Indians' burden" post-independence. The "on their own terms" rhetoric, I argue, helps to cover up the fact that it is in reality not the Adivasis on their own, who are doing everything themselves, but in most cases facilitated by non-Adivasi NGO staff – no matter how invisible a presence the latter would like to maintain. NGO founders, such as Mari and Stan Thekaekara, would ideally like to strike the first "match" to incite a movement, to produce the first "spark" that sets Adivasi consciousnesses afire, then anticipate the fire to spread, and to keep it burning, or at least glowing, by the Adivasis themselves thereafter. Instead, after almost 30 years of work in the valley, it has turned out to be constant cycle of periodical reignition by the activists themselves. Their vision of their withdrawal after ten years, and of the complete handover to the Adivasis, has turned out to be an illusion. This, I argue, ignores the actual impossibility of setting a time after which to "withdraw" because there is no withdrawal from a movement that by definition is a "revolution" that continuously needs to reinvent itself. The NGO founders' idealistic notion of the serial "planting of a seed of a revolution", and their subsequent moving on to the next project, has not panned out in the

way they intended it to. On the basis of this, I question the rationale and usefulness of AMS/ACCORD's casting of Adivasis as imagined revolutionary hero(ine)s.

Imagined revolutionaries?

> *"[I]f development was the God that failed, it was never an adivasi God. People were never enchanted by the myth of development; how could they be when they only experienced its crushing exploitation? There could be no disillusionment when people had no illusions in the first place. The assimilation of adivasi struggles into an anti-development agenda neglects history – that people have always fought against outside oppression, on their own terms. Their history of resistance long precedes the advent of development."*
>
> Amita Baviskar (1995: 241)

Prathama Banerjee (2009) writes that "the expectation seemed to have taken hold that at the end of the day, the Adivasi would come through as the final, radical agency in contemporary politics". Key to understanding the activist renderings of Gudalur tribals as original revolutionary heroes and heroines, in the stories they weave about them, is a Marxist analysis of the Adivasi as the original radical. It is the appeal of the latter that they use as narrative currency in their endeavours to connect anti-capitalist and environmentalist activists with each other, for their mutual, and hence for AMS/ACCORD's benefit too. I call into question, however, whether the international Adivasi narrative is actually a useful one for Gudalur Adivasis. Instead, I argue that it is more of a straightjacket because it forces those subscribed to it (whether of their own or other's accord – or ACCORD's accord) to adhere to certain cultural stereotypes – in the Gudalur activists' case, for instance, the Adivasi as the original eco-revolutionary fighting corporate power, or as the class struggle hero(ine) of Leftist groups in Kerala.

Problems arise, for instance, when Adivasis do not live up to the heroic ideals painted of them in the narratives about them, such as in the case of Chathi's alcoholism, or the Irular's deceitful behaviour that led to their disenfranchisement from the AMS. Baviskar (1995: 234) poignantly expresses the discrepancies between revolutionary ideal and the exigencies of present(-day) concerns in Adivasi activism:

> It [the Andolan] tries to repudiate dominant political values through the moral pressure of passive resistance. […] While the Andolan asserts the establishment of an alternative state structure – village self rule – based on participation and decentralized power, the need to achieve rapid results has compelled the activists to temporarily set aside these stances for more pragmatic action.

In reality, the activists' refined, esoteric, (radical) Christian, Liberation Theology, partly Buddhist, and definitely religious, spiritual, non-materialist/environmentalist views of Adivasis, which they try to realise in their development work with tribals, are often at odds with Adivasis' own modern, present-day conceptions and realities of life, partly brought

about by AMS/ACCORD'S Development interventions since the 1980s. Ironically, I argue, the activists themselves sabotage their Development efforts with a certain type of tribal romanticism. This, I argue, usurps the realisation of the gamut of possibilities of what it means to be Adivasi in India in 2014.

Baviskar (1995: 232) writes that "Adivasi politics does not always embody the principles of progressive thought. These frequent conflicts show that the Adivasi community is not an idyll of harmony and co-operation, but is lived as much through dissent and friction". These concerns, however, tend to be ignored by scholars and activists alike. As Baviskar (1995: 241) writes,

> however noble the cause, appropriation leads to the mediation of the adivasi consciousness by that of the scholar. The discourse of the general theory of development does not allow people to speak for themselves; it tends to be deaf to people's own understanding of their predicament. […] These areas of politics which are autonomous from development tend to be marginalized, even though, ironically, they come closest to constituting truly 'indigenous' 'alternative political culture'.

Activists are prone to treating slightly less positive Adivasi attributes as vestiges of a former "traditional" Adivasi culture that is deemed unsuitable in their notion of a "modern" tribal culture. For, ideally, the combination of positive tribal cultural attributes and modern vocational skills (such as IT and tea cultivation) should enable both Adivasis' future cultural survival, as well as economic prosperity. This, however, is jeopardised by the underlying tension between activists' idealised versions of Adivasi culture and Gudalur Adivasis' lived realities, punctuated by alcoholism, domestic violence, disease, malnutrition, debt, etc., even after 30 years of "development". The activists themselves are fully aware of these contradictions, i.e. both the contradiction between their conceptualisation of Adivasi indigeneity and tribal reality in the Nilgiris, and that some of the "negative" Adivasi cultural traits (such as alcoholism) have intensified as a result of increased cash flow thanks to their "Development" efforts. The activists' reaction to the perceived gap between ideal and reality (deemed pernicious to Adivasi development), however, inevitably seems to consist of an intensification of previous efforts, such as the stepping up of anti-alcohol campaigns. While these intensified efforts do have an effect, it tends to be short-lived, often because of renewed economic difficulties brought on by macroeconomic changes. Culture, depending on how it is conceptualised and realised, serves both as a tool and a hindrance to development, I suggest.

A reason for the dissonance between activist ideology and everyday Adivasi experience, and why much of activist rhetoric often feels contrived, may be that "we cannot automatically 'read off', or read into, the everyday experiences of adivasi an ideology that is derived from an external critique of development" (Baviskar 1995: 238). She goes on to say that "in trying

to demonstrate that the critique of development actually exists in the lives of adivasis, intellectuals end up creating caricatures" (Baviskar 1995: 240). Romantic idealisation can therefore be counterproductive:

> Idealization overstates the transformatory potential of adivasis acting in small, localized movements. It tends to downplay the power of dominant classes. It also underestimates the help and co-operation that is needed to challenge domination […] Idealization ignores the role of the outside activists, whose presence empowers local peoples' struggles and transforms their consciousness. (Baviskar 1995: 242)

Van Schendel (2011: 28) furthermore writes that "[a] romantic celebration of indigeneity (or autochthony) may lead to disturbing or paradoxical results. It may produce an intensification of the 'politics of belonging'". I argue that the activists' idealised versions of Adivasi culture in their stories, no matter how well-intended, end up being at best counterproductive and at worst harmful for Adivasis' own self-directed development. Ultimately, they chiefly serve the purpose of attracting and securing external support from non-Adivasi audiences receptive to such idealised stories of Adivasi life, and thus only marginally represent real Adivasis' daily lives on the local level.

I also argue that it is a fallacy to summarily equate Adivasi peoples all across India with "original rebels", when they all have different, regionally and ethnically disparate his/herstories. As Baviskar (1995: 241) observes, "[g]lossing over the contradictions of people's lives is a tactic that prevents action towards their possible resolution". What kind of representational practice could truly enable such action then? I argue that only the reclaiming of Adivasi self-representation by as broad an Adivasi base as possible is a truly emancipatory form of representation. This, of course, does not guarantee the prevention of exclusions among such an Adivasi base, in terms of socio-economic status, gender, class, and caste (which – contrary to popular representation – does exist in certain sections of the tribal population). It is such representational exclusion, on the basis of differential power relations, that any form of activism constantly needs to be mindful of.

Moving on from imagined revolutionary Adivasi heroism, I now shed more light on another activist imaginary. This one adds a "special" identity marker to the Adivasi hero(ine) – indigeneity.

The imaginary of the Adivasi as an indigenous paragon

This is the activist imaginary central to the narrative of indigeneity described in the previous chapter. The imaginary of indigeneity is characterised by several problematics: the notion of indigenous purity, elusive authenticity, the invention of tradition, the insider/outsider dichotomy, exclusive and excluding identities, and reverse orientalism.

The notion of indigeneity plays a central role in how indigenous activist organisations select the tribal/indigenous people "worthy" of their patronage, protection, and campaigning clout. The criteria/characteristics IP have to fulfil thus come to determine how people have to present themselves to be recognised as indigenous/tribal. The degrees of suffering they have gone through, for instance, contribute to determining whether they "deserve" championship by (international) activist organisations, such as the Dongria Kondh by Survival International, for instance. Accordingly, Adivasis, as a result of these representational power hierarchies, reconceptualise themselves in outsiders' terms, in order to acquire the "fruits" of development (Mosse 2005: 78). Who determines who is indigenous (enough) is largely decided by non-indigenous people though. The non-indigenous criteria of the concept of indigeneity are in turn highly problematic – not least because many of them turn out to be fictional.

Indigenous fictions and the invention of tradition

Fieldwork diary, 17/11/2009, Gudalur

Mari: "They [the Adivasis] did not know about this Adivasi thing before we came here." So in how far is "the Adivasi" contrived? Imposed?

Fieldwork diary, 28/11/2009, Gudalur

Addenda to the "production of the indigenous Adivasi" debate: Viennie today commented about how they introduced the term "Adivasi". Plus, the name of the centre is not being decided by the Adivasis themselves, but essentially by Stan. My personal opinion is that the decision on the name of the cultural centre should be taken by the Adivasi leaders themselves.

As the following activist story demonstrates, fictionalisation is at work in many different directions – Adivasis creating fiction for non-Adivasis, Adivasis unintentionally creating non-fiction for other Adivasis (in this case a Mullukurumba believing the "tall stories" of sylvan mastery of the narratively gifted Kattunayakans, the "masters" of the forest), activists in turn fictionalising Adivasis' fiction for non-Adivasis, anthropologists retelling (and to a certain extent fictionalising) activists' fiction of Adivasis' fiction for non-Adivasis, and so on.

Karunakaran and his Bear Story

We were sitting around, again in Benna, waiting for more people to come while various stories were making the rounds.

I had come there with Karunakaran. He is from the Mullukurumba tribe, but one generation removed from the forests. But having spent eight years working as an anti-poaching watcher, he had re-learnt a lot about the forests and animals. So I thought his forest

stories would be a fair match for the Benna crowd. Yet although he did know a good deal, he could not compare with the Kattunayakans.

As always, soon enough it came around to bears – the most vicious and feared creatures in these forests. The only ones that often attack for no reason, without provocation of any kind. They have huge nails, and stand up on their back legs and aim for the face when attacking. All of them know people who have literally had their faces ripped off. Karadi Maran and his legendary bear fight (in which he lived and got the Karadi title) also came up. All this I had already heard.

Then some new ones popped up. One of the few ways to actually escape from an attack is to go on the offensive! You needed a good stick, and plenty of courage. They claim if you managed to hit it once squarely on the head or face it would leave you and back off. What if you did not manage to get in that shot? Well, you did not have much chance in the first place. I asked about the playing dead theory. All of them had heard it of it, but it seemed none of them were stupid enough to try it.

Then Karunakaran came up with a rather fancy one.

"They say that bears are scared of their own blood. So what you need to do is make it bleed a little at least. The best way to do this is to quickly slit your bamboo into two. But your stick has to be quite long for this. Then you hold out one sliver to the bear. It will grab hold of the other end. Quickly, you have to yank the bamboo back towards you. In trying to hold on to the bamboo the bear's hand will get cut by the sharp edge. It will then examine its bleeding hand for a while, get worried, and walk off without touching you."

Everybody, including me, burst out laughing. Apu was the first to comment: "That's the most ridiculous story I have heard in a long time! Do you think the bear will sit down and wait till you slit the bamboo? And why will it hold on to the bamboo? Trying to indirectly shake your hand?

Karunakaran was most offended. "What are you all laughing for! Its true, one of your people only told me this a few years ago."

Vasu shot back – "Our people all like to tell tall stories. From the time the white people started coming into these forests we've been telling all kinds of stories. We did not think other Adivasis would also believe them!"

Well. That pronouncement just turned half my blog turned into fiction! And here I am trying to document this 'Adivasi Knowledge'. (Thekaekara 2008-09)

Activist Adivasi indigeneity stories are not "true". They represent Adivasis in a particular way, for particular purposes. I argue that they only appear "more true" because certain elements contained therein, and the way these are presented by the activists, correspond more closely to certain audiences' expectations of what stories about Adivasis should sound like, than other stories about Adivasis. As Mosse (2005: 230) argues for development policy,

> [p]olicy discourse generates mobilising metaphors ('participation', 'partnership', 'governance') whose vagueness, ambiguity and lack of conceptual precision is required to conceal ideological differences so as to allow compromise and the enrolment of different interests, to distribute agency and to multiply the criteria of success within project systems. […] Good policy is unimplementable.

I remember Mari, when we were collating and editing stories as told by Adivasis themselves, recorded earlier by other NGO staff, commenting on how "odd" a particular phrasing sounded, and the need to change it to make it intelligible for an audience such as

ours. It is, inter alia, these modifications that add up to refashioning Adivasi characters in the likeness of the activists' imaginaries of what Adivasis (should) look like. These, the activists' pictures of such idealised Adivasis, have over the years been influenced by their contact with international audiences' expectations of the cultural stereotypes Adivasis should adhere to. This is a two-way process – Adivasi cultural traits influence audiences' perceptions of "indigenous" peoples, and Adivasis come to be recast (or redefine themselves) in audiences' terms of what it means to be "indigenous".

Indigeneity, as an extremely malleable and equivocal category, thus lends itself well to the invention of tradition. Its ambiguity is its strength. After all, Adivasi identity is not something that is organic to tribal people. The bow and arrow symbol chosen for the AMS, for instance, is supposed to represent the political unity of the different Gudalur tribes. The bow and arrow, however, is chiefly a Mullukurumba symbol. Steur (2011a: 61) observes similar mixing and matching of Adivasi identity elements for the AGMS:

> Adivasi identity was thus not something that was always already organic to AGMS participants. Those people most active in the movement, namely adivasis from agricultural workers' communities, often had to borrow symbols of dominant ''adivasi-ness'' that they had absolutely no affiliation with, such as the Kurichia bow and arrow represented in the AGMS flag.

Tilche (2011: 35) reminds us that the past traumas IP have experienced may engender the abandonment of certain past cultural traditions and a search for or the "fictive production" of new cultural identities (often more honourable/"better" than the old identities). This is not to say that these new identities are less "authentic" though. Despite the friction between activists' and ordinary peoples' understandings of indigeneity, "native people […] have become not victims but inventive agents of a tangled, open-ended modernity - their returns to the land, performances of heritage, and diasporic ties are strategies for moving toward 'traditional futures'" (Clifford 2013). In this context, we always have to question who is creating these "traditional futures" – the IP/Adivasis themselves or those who claim to represent them. After all, whatever the origin of indigenous fictions, "[t]he romantic celebration of the 'indigenous' tells us more about the celebrator than about the celebrated" (van Schendel 2011: 28). In the AMS/ACCORD activists' case, these are celebrators excessively concerned with Adivasi cultural purity – another central element of the imaginary of the indigenous Adivasi ideal.

Notions of indigenous purity and problematic naturalness

"But tools alone do not deliver resonance. Authenticity does."
Jonah Sachs (2012a)

Fieldwork diary, 20/04/2010, Gudalur

Mari told me about a fight in Kappala between the Kerala (modern) and the Gudalur (more traditional) side of the Mullukurumbas. According to Mari, the Kerala side have for some time (even 15 years back) been quite "modernised". The Gudalur side prefer to hang on to traditions. Mari is of the opinion that they should do their rituals properly, for instance, the *Muppa* [Mullukurumba men] should not wear shirts when dancing, but only the *mundu* [garment worn by men similar to the dhoti].

AMS/ACCORD's activists displayed an overriding concern with tribal cultural purity. Mari, for instance, told me that vicinity to the city is devastating for tribal villages, stating that "they would go to the cinema and drink, things like that". For the activists, the difference between tribals "worthy" and "unworthy" of their patronage was crucial. Their assessment of Adivasis' "worthiness" was based largely on tribals' adherence to the activists' notions of typical tribal cultural traits. The Irular tribe, for instance, no longer conformed to their stereotypical conception of an authentically indigenous Adivasi after they cheated on AMS/ACCORD. Tilche (2011: 55) identifies a similar concern, i.e. of who was considered less and more pure an Adivasi, at the Adivasi Academy in Gujarat. Such concerns with preserving, or rather constructing Adivasi purity, are also visible, for instance, in the selective masking of "uncomfortable" elements of indigenous cultures in the Adivasi Tee Projekt school materials on IP, which, for instance, obscure the original purpose of Maya ball games deemed too violent.

In this context, Alpa Shah (2007: 1824) notes that for many young Jharkhandi Adivasis, seasonal labour migration to the brick kilns has become preferable to the puritanical indigenous identity politics at home, which conceptualises this type of migration as "a threat to the purity and regulation of the social and sexual tribal citizen". There, young Adivasis try to escape what Sissons (2005) terms "oppressive authenticity". This, I argue, demonstrates that the demand for the elusively "authentic" can quickly turn oppressive for its bearers.

Elusive and oppressive authenticity

Central to indigeneity is the performance of authenticity. As Conklin (1997) vividly demonstrates for the "authentically indigenous" Kayapo, authenticity equals rhetorical power and therefore political influence. The performance of authenticity is central to the performance of Adivasi indigeneity. Examples for this are the tribal dances performed by the tribal school children, as well as the adults, for visitors to AMS/ACCORD. This has become part of the particular kind of "Development tourism" that is an integral part of NGO life in Gudalur. What we see here is "staged authenticity":

> The common concept of authenticity held by almost all these wanderers is a mythical one grounded in a pre-tourist world, linked to ideas of unchanging cultures unaffected by the outside. So all today's tourists get to see are performances of "staged authenticity," where the fact that the event has to be put on for, or remain mindful of, the visitors robs it of the very quality so many have traveled to seek. The paradise they search for is forever postponed. (MacClancy 2002: 428)

The related concerns of purity and authenticity in turn form the basis for indigeneity's "exclusiveness".

The insider/outsider dichotomy and exclusive and excluding identity representations

Indigeneity produces dichotomies along the lines of "indigenous/non-indigenous" and "Adivasi/non-Adivasi". This can quickly engender processes of exclusion, on the basis of exclusive identity constructions. As van Schendel (2011: 30) warns,

> political entrepreneurs […] create ideologies and practices of belonging that point to claims of *exclusive* rights and to strategies of purification that may result in ethnic cleansing. […] In the current global conjuncture, progressive ideas about 'indigenous people' may therefore fuse with xenophobic ideologies of belonging.

Tilche (2011: 27), in her work on the Adivasi Academy in Gujarat, writes that "in order to be recognised they also need to be 'distinguished' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 186), comply with human rights standards, be sustainable and positive, and possibly folk or indigenous (Kurin 2004: 69)". She further identifies "community and identity as a prerequisite to demands for funding and recognition". This, however, she suggests, "in turn clears the way for a series of exclusions – of those identities that are not 'pure' or 'indigenous' enough, often according to external evaluations" (Tilche 2011: 28). Most often, the criteria determining more or less "indigenousness" are thus externally ascribed and exclusive criteria.

It is this exclusiveness of Adivasi identities propounded by NGOs such as AMS/ACCORD that is my main point of criticism. Such excluding exclusiveness often amounts to a distortion of local tribal people's lives, in terms of the realpolitik of their daily lives, e.g. the cultural, socio-economic, linguistic, and religious differences between the different tribes, and the conflicts and fault lines between them predating AMS/ACCORD's involvement. These betray the activists' idealised picture of tribal cultural unity for Development purposes.

What is also objectionable and contributes to an exclusive conception of Adivasis, is that stories of and about Adivasis are told in non-Adivasi terms, specifically in activist, environmentalist/eco-romanticist terms. Despite the fact that the activist narrators of Adivasi lives claim to use "indigenous" terminology and emic concepts, they fall short of their own aspirations, I argue. Even though the activist storytellers of Adivasi stories do not usually do so purposefully, they often construct Adivasis as a wholly different ethnic category (and even

race) – a people whose lifestyle and culture are not compatible with those of non-Adivasis. They thus create an aura of exclusivity around Adivasis and their cultures, barring access to the uninitiated, implying that the understanding of Adivasi cultures takes a lifetime's commitment (such as their own). They also construct Adivasi lifeworlds as a kind of cultural utopia that is simultaneously lost in the past and unattainable in the future, unless the measures prescribed by the activists to prevent cultural erosion are taken.

Possibly young Adivasis' perceived lack of interest in their own history stems not only from a generational disconnect, but also from a lack of opportunity to create their own history, or to form their own understanding of their parents' history, independent from the constant reenactment of their parents' original struggle encouraged by AMS/ACCORD. In the face of such powerful representational monopolies on Adivasi narrativity, it may appear pointless to call for the need for Adivasis to reclaim their own storytelling. Specifically, since tribal peoples in India often either do not lay "claim", in proprietary non-Adivasi terms, to such representation to the non-Adivasi world, or have less desire of self-representation than non-Adivasis have of representing them.

What is too simplistic a view though is that different Indian/local depictions of tribals, e.g., on the one hand, Supriya Sahu, the Nilgiris Collector in 2001, writing that "[t]ribals zealously guard their life style and ancient traditions and open their doors only with caution and wisdom. Traditional honeyhunting is one such ancient tradition" (Keystone 2007), and, on the other, activist writing about Adivasis, for instance Keystone (2007: ix) writing that "Adivasis are passionate about honey", and that there is a "close link between Adivasis and bees", are merely another form of someone else writing history about and for Adivasis, in the vein of colonial literature on tribals. Rather, this is a complex interplay between activist representations, tribal stereotypes held by intended and unintended audiences, and Adivasis' frequent reluctance at self-representation.

Not only is indigeneity an excluding, but also – related to this – an orientalising discourse, through which claims to Adivasis are articulated.

Claims to Adivasis by way of orientalising discourses

Demmer (2008) notes that Adivasis are known to use subterfuge/cunning and feigned ignorance when interacting with people perceived to be outsiders to their community, even after years. This observation reminded me of the comment of Stan's that he will never fully understand tribals. I question the purpose such othering serves though. I argue that this approach creates the appearance that Adivasis are "wholly different" cultures, and thus worth

championing and preserving. One could argue that this represents classic orientalism on the part of the activists, in that "[t]he assimilation of adivasis into different ideological projects parallels the way in which the East came to be defined in different Orientalist constructions" (Baviskar 1995: 240). By subscribing to the classically orientalist trope that Adivasis cannot be left behind on the path to modernity, the activists indirectly deny agency and reason to Adivasis. This, I argue, is a way of positioning the locus of agency firmly in the activists' camp.

As previously argued, such an orientalising discourse in part serves to justify AMS/ACCORD's continued presence and intervention as Development workers, and thus their life's work in Gudalur. Realistically, after 30 years (in 2014), not much of the "Adivasi self-rule/withdrawal of external development workers after ten years" talk is still credible. I argue that the boundaries between Adivasis and non-Adivasis have become so blurred that the originally envisaged withdrawal has actually become impossible. This is especially the case since, continually, circumstances and events seem to be conspiring against such a withdrawal, e.g. the sangam secretary's death, increasing funding exingencies, obligations, and work loads, the difficulty of obtaining funding for Adivasis to train as higher qualified staff such as accountants and nurses, and so forth.

A different reading offers itself if taking Ferguson's (1994) "anti-politics" governmentality perspective on NGOs forming part of the development apparatus. As he argues, Development's main effect has been to de-politicise questions of how resources should be distributed through reinforcing bureaucratic processes and therefore power. On AMS/ACCORD's relative lack of political involvement (save for occasional demonstrations and petitions to district-level officials) on the regional as well as national level Stan and Manoharan explained to me that NGOs are banned from engaging in political activity in Tamil Nadu. At the same time as depriving NGOs such as AMS/ACCORD of a legitimate political voice in the public arena (which they have though nevertheless, through other channels and by virtue of their powerful brokerage position enabled by financial backing) this state-enforced political ban enables NGOs to position themselves as relatively a-political actors seeking merely "development" solutions (e.g. conflict mediation in the management of human-wildlife co-existence, biodiversity conservation, introduction of or promotion of supposedly more sustainable indigenous land use practices), which, however, concern very political decisions - i.e. the allocation of scarce resources such as land, water and minor forest produce such as honey in a resource-rich environmental context characterised by population pressure and over-exploitation. At the same time, it is this "logic of scarcity" and its

mitigation and management for the benefit of its rightful claimants (i.e. the Adivasis) that contributes to NGOs' ideological justification of their presence.

Taking orientalism into account, I have so far suggested that the activist imaginaries of the Adivasi culture hero(ine) and the indigenous paragon can represent fundamentally othering discourses – especially if such imaginaries originate not in Adivasis' own, but, the activists' thinking. I now turn to another problematic and equally orientalising imaginary, in which the culture hero(ine) and the indigenous paragon join forces to save the world from environmental destruction. This is the activist imaginary of the Adivasi as an environmental ambassador.

The imaginary of the Adivasi as an eco-activist ambassador

This is the activist imaginary that helps create the narrative of environmental stewardship described in the previous chapter. In this imaginary, Adivasis are turned into eco-activist ambassadors, who help the non-indigenous world indigenise. Central to this imaginary are the two activist-originated attributes of sustainability and anti-capitalism, which activists project onto tribal cultures. This is a notion developed by the activists on the basis of their experience of Adivasis' adherence to and rejection of certain livelihood practices.

Ecological sustainability and anti-capitalism: "indigenising" the non-indigenous world

> "*Our attitude should be one of learning from them as, unlike us, they lead a need-based and not a greed-based life."*
> Kausalya Santhanam (2009)

AMS/ACCORD activists widely employ rhetoric loaned from international eco-romanticist indigenous discourse. For instance, in an exchange of messages between Germans and Adivasis via a German volunteer in Gudalur in 2013, we find the recurring environmentalist theme of curbing resource use to increase personal happiness and wellbeing, and to ensure the future sustainability of resources:

She also took the "tea leaves" collected at the Church Day with her [to Gudalur]. *On them visitors to the Church Day had written that they had too little time, moments of quiet, calmness, and tolerance, too little solidarity, joy, renouncement, gratitude, and social cohesion. There is too much stress, consumption, food, and waste. They do, however, have sufficient food, money, and freedom in their lives. Many other things were mentioned and may inspire the Adivasi to further think about what they want to fight for, what they do not necessarily need, and what is worth preserving.* (ATP Rundbrief (newsletter) Aug. 2013, my translation from German)

AMS/ACCORD's (comparatively speaking, elite) activists portray Adivasis (and other disadvantaged communities) as a source of moral and environmental conscience – when it is in fact non-Adivasis projecting idealised and supposedly lost moral consciences on to Adivasis:

But you can draw your inspiration from the communities they work with. Villagers and rural communities, warts and all, can still be places where you can regain your lost spirituality and your moral equilibrium if you venture there with humility and openness. You are not saving the world, you are saving yourself. There is more wisdom in these simple communities than in all of IBM, WIPRO and Infosys. The poor know what is good for them. You cannot with your savvy, city ways know what's best for them. You can help them if you use your skills, your technology, your education, to implement their ideas. Visit good projects first. Do not be disillusioned by the frauds. Find out who does best practice. But like Gandhi said "Go to the villages". Or the slums in your city. (Marcel Thekaekara 2013a)

An interesting case of the origins of the landscape belonging elsewhere (Varma 2003: 224) is that of AMS/ACCORD's furniture production from the "highly pernicious" weed lantana, and its concomitant resignification by AMS/ACCORD, i.e. as the weed's defeat at the creative hands of Adivasis. The activists construe this to signify postcolonial victory over foreign forces. This is testimony not only to the inventive conceptual inclusionism of the activists' Adivasi identity constructions, but also, I argue, another curious case of AMS/ACCORD's unholy marriage of anti-capitalist rhetoric and the capitalist income practices it encourages and helps Adivasis to develop.

Campbell (2007: 107) asks, "why it might be politically expedient for indigenous peoples to present themselves as 'responsible guardians of the Earth's resources' and ally themselves with environmentalists". To this I would add the question why it might be rhetorically expedient for environmental activists to latch their causes primarily onto so-called IP, and, specifically, why ACCORD chose to work with tribal peoples. Indeed, it is this line of argumentation – that a "special relationship" to land entails a "more" legitimate right to it – that AMS/ACCORD activists use as a clincher to argue their self-reliance strategy on the basis of indigeneity. Indigenist-environmentalist arguments speak so strongly, and activists prefer to avail themselves of these kinds of narratives, because of their connection to powerful issues:

> Indigenous people living in environments declared threatened have got the hang of the reasoning behind the pre-eminence of universal interest over local interests and how they can make the best of it. Accordingly they have begun to present themselves as the keepers of nature – an abstract notion which does not appear in their languages or cultures – to whom the international community should entrust the mission to keep watch at their level on environments which it is becoming clearer everyday have been shaped by their practices. (Descola 2008)

Even though the link between the protection of the environment by local IP, on the basis of environmentalist motives, is often a spurious one, and even though eco-indigenist activists, such as those of AMS/ACCORD, are partly aware of this, they are fond of citing examples of local efforts of environmental protection and resistance against environmental degradation in India, such as Bishnoi/Rajasthan and the Chipko Movement in Uttarakhand. This is the case even though the activists are aware that, in the case of Chipko, for instance, people's motivation stemmed less from notions of Western environmentalism, and more from the protection of livelihoods dependent on access to forest produce (Guha 1990). As Baviskar (1995: 241), in this context, writes about past tribal livelihood practices,

> [t]heir low-impact use of nature in earlier time was probably as much adventitious as it may have been deliberate; adivasis were limited by demography and technology from using resources destructively. Therefore it becomes hard to say whether their 'traditions' can be uncritically extolled as epitomizing sustainability, and what potential they hold as an ideal in the present, vastly changed, context.

The use of such environmentalist narratives, despite their well-known conceptual flaws, is, I argue, a rhethorical tactic by the activists, mostly aimed at disarming anti-Adivasi propaganda. Again, the exclusiveness of the category of the indigenous Adivasi, on the basis of which activists argue the latter's more legitimate right to land is, however, the main Achilles heel in their argumentation, since indigeneity is a concept not exclusively claimed by Adivasis.

Significantly, the rhetorical coup of turning anti-Adivasi rhetoric on its head is not reserved to non-Adivasi activists only. C.K. Janu, Kerala's Adiya AGMS leader, has expressed her non-acceptance of the tribal backwardness narrative by stating that "now we say in fact everybody should follow Adivasi culture, for the good of the world" (Steur 2011a: 70).

We are familiar with the critique of putting words reminiscent of Rousseau's idealism into tribal people's mouths, and the exposure of myths about "primitive ecological wisdom" as environmentalist fantasies and escapism – more often than not leading to the burden and subsequent non-fulfillment of such expectations, which may actually disadvantage the people thus idolised. Anna Tsing observes on the rise of ecological Marxism (Baviskar 1997: 195), with its dual concern of social justice and ecological sustainability, that,

> the network around 'environmental stewardship' [is] most problematic as it can lead to a 'natural resource tug-of-war'" and that the real issue that always undermines environmentalist conceptions of indigenous utopias is the fact that "capitalist resource use structures even the most oppositional design for people and nature in indigenous zones" (Tsing 2007: 57).

Again, I suggest that AMS/ACCORD's representation of Adivasis as environmentalist paragons often achieves the opposite of its intended outcome, being limiting, self-defeating,

counterproductive, and possibly even damaging because of its privileging of a particular view of Adivasis, especially when Adivasis do not adhere to environmentalist stereotypes. Balancing representation for different audiences is a perilous tightrope walk and considering the two-way process that representation always is, authors are never in control of the reception of their texts. Activists campaigning/writing on behalf of Adivasis/IP would therefore do well to choose their language and representational strategies more carefully, so as both not to sabotage their own work and, more importantly, avoid possible damage to the lives of those they write about, as a result of unsound and tendentious representation. What "proper" representation may consist of, is a debate that will most likely never be settled. What it is not, is possible to point out though, such as Stephen Corry (current director of Survival International) referring to the Yanomami shaman and indigenous rights activist Davi Kopenawa as a "'child' of the forest" (Corry 2014). This is an infantilising designation that dangerously supports existing stereotypes and tendentiousness in the representation of indigenous and/or tribal peoples. Such examples serve to remind us of the perils of mis/representation – in particular, that the noble savage myth can be as dangerous as the brutal savage myth. It is worth reminding ourselves that it is for this reason that valiant attempts by activists and/or anthropologists alike, to reclaim and resignify such loaded terms as "cannibalism" and worn-out concepts such as "harmonious relationship with 'nature'", often backfire, owing to the overwhelming amount of popular connotations attached to them, meaning everything other than the original meaning. To take the eco-indigenist concept of IP "living in harmony with nature" as an example – its popular connotations include voluntary simplicity, responsible and sustainable resource use, and the nurturing of human/non-human relationships. Such a lifestyle, however, is essentially a luxury, which most IP cannot afford today because they lack land. Most Adivasis do not have access to the resources that would allow them to develop a harmonious relationship with their environment(s). Instead, sheer survival often necessitates exploitative environmental practices, thus, ironically, rendering these people non-indigenous and hence less worthy of protection. In this case, environmentalist and eco-romanticist ascriptions, and Adivasis' lived realities, are starkly at odds with ground actualities, and, above all, too one-dimensional. Again, it comes as no surprise that this discrepancy in the politics of Adivasi representation has more to do with the needs and desires of nature-deprived urban audiences than with Adivasis themselves.

Next up, and connected to the heroic, indigenous, and eco-ambassadorial imaginaries of Adivasis, is the activist imaginary of the tribal as an organic intellectual.

The imaginary of the Adivasi as an organic intellectual

I argue that AMS/ACCORD try to position and develop Adivasis into "organic intellectuals", a term coined by Antonio Gramsci in his endeavour to distinguish between politically disinterested "traditional" intellectuals, and politically active "organic" intellectuals, who speak on behalf of a certain class or group of people. The way AMS/ACCORD try to do this, I argue, is through their "culture" efforts, described in the section "AMS/ACCORD and culture" in the previous chapter.

In contrast to the managerial world of Development, Adivasi cultures tend not to draw modernity's clear line between the secular and the sacred. Clearly, the activists' attempts at restorifying Development, and thereby not just foregrounding the requisites of Adivasi cultures in their Development work, but also infusing Development with tribal culture, is an attempt at breaking down in Development the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, and the material and non-material/ideal. It has to be born in mind though, that such a dichotomisation is again a non-Adivasi concept. The promotion of kaavus (sacred groves) by AMS/ACCORD can be seen as an attempt to revive the sacred as a promising field of resistance. While the designation or resignification/reinvention of the tribal sacred as a site and means of Adivasi resistance by the activists may not always be sustainable (as evidenced by the rituals' financial dependence on AMS/ACCORD and their dependence in turn on external funding), the reintegration of the spiritual aspects of tribal cultures into Adivasis' daily lives provides an ideological means for political expression and action/resistance. The expression of the political (demand for land/education/health etc. rights) is facilitated by the unification not only of different tribal identities under one common umbrella Adivasi identity, but also by the reunification of different spheres of tribal life, previously rent apart by land dispossession and cultural disintegration. In addition to the revival of kaavus, another such endeavour is the faithful observance of the singing of tribal songs and the playing of tribal games in school every day, in an attempt to instil in tribal children from an early age the suffusion of everyday life with tribalness/Adivasiness, as imagined by the activists to have previously been the case in bygone times (see the Golden Age problematic though), in their desire to return to the pre-modern. Tribal dances, songs, rituals, etc. – expressions of tribal culture in short – metonymically become an "Adivasi education". It should come as no surprise that this engenders and is expressly designed by the activists to foster new forms of tribalness, by the melding of previously distinct (and even caste-like separated) tribal cultures, e.g. through having the children in Vidyodaya sing each other's different tribal songs.

To what extent such "prescribed" culture, as exemplified by the CC activities, tribal culture in the school's curriculum, or the tribal dancing out of context at the Darpana Chembakolli event, resembles "real" (if there is such a thing at all) Adivasi culture though, ultimately remains a matter of speculation (and hence not solely for myself as the ethnographer to judge). The boundaries between "real" and "artificial" culture are always fluid, and culture is always a field of contestation, accommodation, adoption, adaptation, and ultimately circumstantially contingent creative fabrication. Undoubtedly, the encouragement of the "revitalisation" of tribal cultures by the activists is a form of contesting the status quo of Adivasi life realities in the Nilgiris, by not accepting them as they are, but imagining how they might be. As Marcuse (1978) argues – that the aesthetic can function as an indirect catalytic for social change – tribal culture, in this context, is intended by the activists to serve as a means of subversion, in their effort to bring about social change. Through imagining an ideal(ised) version of a unified Adivasi culture, the activists try to bring about the material realisation of this culture hitherto denied by reality.

All of the above points to what I would argue is AMS/ACCORD's positioning of Adivasis as "organic intellectuals". Antonio Gramsci held that "the mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence … but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator…" (Gramsci, Hoare et al. 1998 [1971]: 10). Organic intellectuals seek to win consent for counter-hegemonic ideas and ambitions. The rationale of AMS/ACCORD's cultural camps for the Adivasi youngsters, for instance, is one of turning Adivasis into organic intellectuals, i.e. the "inculcation" of activist notions of Adivasi indigeneity in tribal youth. This is intended as a counter-initiative both to the camps organised by right-wing Hindutva organisations (such as the Sangh Parivar), and to what the activists perceive to be economic ideology threats, such as capitalism and concomitant consumerism, and its symptoms, such as addiction to alcohol and consumer goods. These camps are supposed to strengthen Adivasi adolescents' cultural grounding, so as to be able to withstand cultural conversion.

Next to the Sanskritic origin of the names of some of AMS/ACCORD's institutions and organisations, the apparent similarity of ideological methods – such as the training camps – between Hindutva-influenced political groups and NGOs such as AMS/ACCORD will be noted. I am aware that this has the potential to be read as having emerged as a result of Hindutva's influence. While I do not exclude this possibility, I consider it highly unlikely, given AMS/ACCORD's left-liberal political leanings, and would consider it more likely to be derived from the influence of Malayalam (with its Sanskritic base) in the region, since the

lingua franca spoken in the Gudalur region is a mixture between Tamil and Malayalam. I would thus argue that some of AMS/ACCORD's activities that could be read as being influenced by Hindutva are in fact explicitly intended to restrict the encroachment of Hindutva-based political organisations increasingly operating in the region.

Nevertheless, the positing of IP/Adivasis as organic intellectuals has not yielded the results intended by AMS/ACCORD. So far, activists' efforts to "inoculate" tribal youngsters against the threats described above, and to incentivise tribal culture in an environment increasingly suffused with tendencies opposed to traditional tribal cultures, has, understandably, proven only marginally successful. Possibly, I suggest, the task of rendering tribal culture more attractive than baazaria culture (Baviskar 2006, 2007) has been complicated by the activists' adherence to an anti-secular, postmodern Adivasi imaginary.

The imaginary of the anti-secular, postmodern Adivasi

Meera Nanda (2003), in her study of Hindu supremacist ideologues' misuse of postmodern scholars' call for non-Western societies to develop their own decolonised science(s), raised the important criticism that the postmodernist Left has unwittingly aided the growth of reactionary modernism in India. Equally, Kiely (1999) launched an attack against post-development, criticising it for empowering anti-modern fundamentalists and traditionalists, who may hold non-progressive and oppressive values. I argue that (non-Adivasi) social activists, in their attempt to establish claims to resources (such as land), based on indigenist rhetorical strategies, walk a dangerous tightrope between successful indigenist assertion, and potentially detrimental (even though inadvertent) cultural relativism, by positing 1) "indigenous" as fundamentally different from surrounding non-indigenous mainstream societies, and 2) Adivasi cultures as operating according to such a fundamentally other, "different" indigenous cultural logic.

While the adoption of indigenist rhetoric by the activists is a way of laying claim to their involvement with "their" tribals, it is this kind of indigenist cultural relativism that can be hijacked by reactionary social forces, such as the right-wing Hindu RSS. They can subsequently twist it to rhetorically serve their own claims to Adivasis, since – under RSS logic – tribals need to be co-opted "back" into the Hindu fold, and redefined as Hindu because assimilationist Hindu nationalism does not allow other groups' historical primacy on Indian soil. Adivasis' "indigeneity" can thus be claimed for very sinister ends, turning the indigenous – as a fundamentally exclusive and excluding identity category – into a trap for Adivasis. Van Schendel's (2011: 28) warnings regarding the dangers of belonging, and the dark side of

indigenist activists' alternative modernity constructions (argued for ethnic-warfare-torn North-East India, but applicable elsewhere), are arguments the Gudalur activists ignore at their own peril, I suggest.

I argue that the re- or new spiritualisation of tribal cultures by AMS/ACCORD, for instance, in the form of the revival of traditional religious rituals (such as the *kaavu* ritual), does not always present an engagement with modernity "on their own terms". This, I posit, is the case because the anachronistic elements of the activists' eco-spiritualism prevent a truly culturally self-reliant 21st century Adivasi secularism from developing. I argue that the activists' motives underpinning such religious revival are too much rooted in an imagined golden tribal past, to allow any viable, modern, politically emancipated Adivasi identity to emerge from it. The demonisation of modernity, as the death knell for tribal cultures, instead of a constructively critical engagement with modernity, and the failure of the activists' frantic efforts to prevent cultural erosion and instil tribal youngsters with past tribal culture, are testament to the backfiring of reactionary postmodernism, I suggest.

Notwithstanding the validity of "indigenous" critiques, it is the danger of such cultural relativism being reinstrumentalised by interest groups ideologically diametrically opposed to Adivasi subaltern interests, such as the RSS described above, that is often underestimated. While the activists' hope for Adivasis' political emancipation and cultural empowerment may be genuine, the particular rhetorical strategies of eco-romanticism, and cultural and territorial ancestralisation they have chosen, among others, are prone to being coopted by ideologues of very different colour, whether fascist, Maoist, Hindu-fundamentalist, or from elsewhere on the religious and political extremist spectrum. As argued above, the activists' indigeneity narratives may, for instance, unwittingly play into the hands of right-wing Hindu demagogues and further their Hinduisation drives of Adivasis. Unfortunately, Adivasis have not been exempted from indigenism as a reactionary, anti-secular force.

This points to deep-seated problems with the activists' imaginary of the anti-secular, postmodern Adivasi. This is the case not least because of problematic Christian influences in AMS/ACCORD.

The imaginary of the Christian Adivasi

This imaginary forms the basis of the activists' narratives of community and family, and of cultural unity, described in the previous chapter. These are – in line with the core activists' (Mari and Stan's) Christian belief – Christian-influenced ideas that the activists, however, situate in and represent as if arising out of Adivasis' own cultural ethos. Activists' emphatic

denial of the influence of their Christian roots on their work with Adivasis is a result, I argue, of Christianity's problematic standing in India, and the history of Hindu right-wing reprisals against Christian-based organisations. The narrative of the religiously syncretic Adivasi that the activists like to promote, whose cultural ethos supposedly revolves around traditional values such as family and ethnic unity therefore has its roots, I argue, simultaneously in the negation of, and the inevitable influence of some of the activists' Christian-influenced belief system. These Christian influences present certain problems.

Problematic Christian influences

> *"[T]heir first tactic was not to share their knowledge but to discern the motivation of outsiders that, in this case, appeared deviously clothed in the rhetoric of participation, facilitation or handing over control to local people. There were accusations that project workers were proselytising Christian missionaries, which had become a pervasive idiom of mistrust in the region."*
> David Mosse (2011: 159)

Adivasis' relationship with Christianity, as with other dominant faiths, is both problematic and contested. This is partly because both Christian missionaries and Hindu nationalists indulge in cultural imposition. Christian-based and Hindu far-right-based movements, in their respective bids for Adivasi allegiance, are locked in a violent battle for Adivasi allegiance. In nationalist Hindu rhetoric, Christian-based organisations are portrayed as anti-nationalist because of their alleged inculcation in Adivasis of a demand for a separate state (Prasad 2003: 94). Also, the issue of foreign funding of Indian churches is a thorn in Hindu nationalists' side (Prasad 2003: 96). For Adivasis, it is mostly economic necessity that is the paramount reason for their conversion to Christianity (Prasad 2003: 97).

In India, religiosity and ostensibly liberal, enlightened rationalism share an uneasy closeness. This is reflected in the role faith, and Christianity, in particular, play in AMS/ACCORD's work. Significantly, the activists strenuously claim to separate their personal faith from their work, to the extent of defaming Christian missionary organisations and their activities. Yet they themselves fail in this endeavour because their personal Christian socialisations inevitably influence their development agenda and practice. AMS/ACCORD's Christian activists (Mari and Stan foremost; the other founder couples are of different or no faith) thus hold contradictory views on the influence of their faith on their work. In the same breath, they decry the influence of rampant proselytising Christian missions on Adivasis, and eulogise the religious syncretism practiced in Vidyodaya, which celebrates every major Hindu, Christian, and tribal (but not Muslim) festival. As a result of accusations of converting Adivasis to Christianity levelled against AMS/ACCORD from different camps, including

radical Marxists and Hindutva extremists, they are defensive about their Christian origins and aver at every possible opportunity that they are not engaged in the conversion of Adivasis.

At the same time though, Christianity's influence in AMS/ACCORD manifests itself in significant ways. The activists unquestioningly condone Christian cultural practices (such as when I was asked to teach Vidyodaya children English Christmas carols in the run-up to Christmas), and widely use Christian narratology in their Development work. For instance, they metaphorise tribal ways of thinking with loan narratives from Christian mythology. This is epitomised by the similarities of the recurring activist theme of David against Goliath to Stan's "Bomman against Unilever" story. Activists draw analogies between biblical and tribal stories, i.e. there is a correlation between narrativisation in the bible and the activists' storifying of Adivasi life. Activists' stories exhibit a biblical-style narrative teleology. There is a strong "liberation" current to the activists' Development philosophy, stemming from their early activist socialisation during student days in Liberation Theology (Gutierrez 1973) and radical Christianity. In this context, it has been argued that Christian and Gandhian development activists have continued where missionaries left off. Indeed, to some extent, the activists practice a form of Elwinian cultural primitivism. Prominent is also the link between Christianity and a certain type of self-reliance, i.e. the Christian goal to develop an austere and self-sufficient daily routine. Tribal "self-reliance", however, is different to the Christian version, as Prasad (2003: 79) argues. Activities such as craft education are supposed to provide material and spiritual sustenance (Prasad 2003: 85). Also, the link between Christianity and the temperance movement provides the foundation for AMS/ACCORD'S zealous anti-alcohol campaigning. The activists' inculcation in Adivasis to aspire to a higher than the former tribal lifestyle is linked to activist notions of what it means to be a "good" person (Prasad 2003: 79).

Above all though, it is the (Christian) idea of what it means to live a good life that is a recurring theme guiding the activists' moral compass in their efforts to influence public opinion on Adivasis. Prasad (2003: xix) notes that "ecological romanticism and religious fundamentalism relate so well to each other because they both rely on a theory of a "Golden Age" or past and humankind's fall from the pristine stage of perfection." In this respect, Christian theology and ecological romanticism share certain theoretical characteristics. Accordingly, there are three components to Gudalur Adivasi stories: a "golden" tribal past (paradise), the loss of paradise, and the return to paradise. Examples for the theory of a "golden age" in the tribal past are, for instance:

Kesavan and Thambi (Mullakurumba elders): In those days we used to eat fresh meat three to four times a week. What we couldn't eat we dried. Every family had a bamboo platform over the fire. The surplus meat was placed on this in strips and smoked. There was always a supply of dried meat for guests who turned up unexpectantly. Food was good in those days. The women went fishing. The ponds were full of fish. No one ever came back empty-handed. (Cromar 2010)

In olden days the Adivasi people lived together on small plots of land. They did not bother about land and education. They went for coolie work and lived peacefully". (Kumar 2014)

Examples for stories about the loss of and expulsion from paradise are:

Chathi – a Paniya from Cheenath village: I remember as a boy, my father owned enough land for us to live comfortably. Then a Chetan came from Kerala. He set up a tea shop near us. My father worked on his land sometimes. Soon we were in debt. It started with small sums of money. Twenty, thirty rupees. I didn't know how much my father owed him finally. But the scene that is indelibly burnt into my brain is of us being thrown off our own land. My mother was clutching my sister's hand. I followed. The Chetan seized our cooking pots even. My father had to leave his shirt and mund behind. And we left weeping with the Chetan's insults and abuses ringing in our ears. (Cromar 2010)

Story from Thambi – a Mullakurumba: In those days we didn't know the meaning of the term forest department. We took whatever we needed from the forest. Firewood, thatch for our houses, fruits, leaves, bamboo for building. For centuries this is the way our people lived. We loved the forest. And the forest loved us! Now it is protected. Even women are harrassed if they pick up dead wood, twigs to cook their evening meal. But go and stand at the check posts. You'll see truckloads of timber going out. Huge trees which our grandmothers would never have dreamed of cutting. That's what protection means. (Cromar 2010)

Manben – leader of Bettakurumba of Theppakadu hamlet in Mudumalai sanctuary: My heart is sorely troubled. After leading these people of mine for the last 30, 40 years, through all kinds of troubles, through difficult journeys, it has come to this – I must leave them and go in search of a new place to live. In matters pertaining to my people, their lives, their traditions, customs and practices, I am the leader.... The old times have gone. Now they do not care for the chiefs or the gods even. The Forest Officers, the Ranger, the Warden and the Conservator are the new gods... But can this new education teach a man about life? Can he create the essentials- the soil; the water; fire? For those things we must still respect the Gods. And the ones chosen to lead the way. Must we not? (Cromar 2010)

A story of Chathi – he earlier talked of being forced off his land. He became a fervent animator and fired up the emotions of others to stand together against change: Why are you poor? Why is it when we had all the land we've been allowed it to slip into the hands of outsiders? Why is it we work for them day in and day out? They become richer and richer and we become poorer and poorer? Even a dog has it's own territory. When another dog enters it barks. Puts up a fight. Chases away the other dog. We welcomed everyone. Laughed when they built fences. Now we're worse than the neighbourhood dogs. They've got their territory. We've lost ours. (Cromar 2010)

The two stories at the beginning of this thesis, "The March" and "Chorian's Stand", are examples for stories about the return to/of paradise. Similarly, CORD (an NGO in Karnataka), another organisation founded by activists of Christian faith, describes its mission thus:

The Call

We were people pushed out of our home lands, left to eat mud, to keep our life, our culture distorted and our identity eliminated. We craved on streets and were crushed by the mighty before we had a days [sic] meal. Then came a call revebrating [sic] in our ears,"born in unjust society we shall not die in it, until we change it."

Along with, and together with the caller, we now strive to regain all that we lost, our homelands, our culture, our identity and thus for dignified exixtence [sic] and survival as distinct people of national polity. (CORD 2008)

Undoubtedly, the activists would – ideally – like to resurrect what, in their reckoning, amounts to a glorious tribal past. This stems, inter alia, from their imaginings of Adivasis as original Christians, as seen, for instance, in the "Parable of the labourers" story introduced in the chapter "Stories of Adivasi self-reliance". There is a faulty logic, however, I argue, to activists' interpretation of attributes as conforming to a particular type of indigeneity – in this case a Christian-influenced indigeneity – if tribals consider these attributes perfectly commonplace aspects of their cultures, such as the sharing aspect in the "Parable of the labourers". Based on this, I suggest that even in environments where Adivasi indigenist sentiments are fairly widespread – as is the case for South India with its dense NGO presence – the adoption and performance of external identity constructions, such as indigeneity, by the people thus designated, are by default limited if these are not naturally part of tribal people's emic self-conseptualisations. This, I argue, is emblematic of the wider disconnect between originally middle-class non-Adivasi activists and the subaltern majority of Adivasi peoples. Ultimately, I therefore question whether the activist imaginaries described here leave room for a self-defined, post-indigenous Adivasi, devoid of historically sedimented stereotypes. This I see as the central problem with these activist imaginaries of Adivasi indigeneities.

From this discussion of some of the problems with activists' imaginary representations of Adivasi indigeneity, I now move on to how, on the one hand, selected aspects of post-indigenous Adivasi realities present themselves today, in Gudalur, and in India in general, and

how, on the other hand, Adivasis may create the space necessary to reclaim self-representation.

Post-indigenous Adivasi realities

Sissons (2005: 152) writes of the "post-indigenous", i.e. "indigenous" peoples who do not want to be identified as "indigenous" any more. I would further elaborate this concept by defining its two aspects – on the one hand, the post-indigenous life realities IP face independent of their choosing or influence, as a result of which IP may reject the indigeneity label; and, on the other hand, an actively crafted, self-determined post-indigenous identity. It is to both the former, and to a self-defined, post-indigenous conceptualisation of Adivasis *by* Adivasis, that activists, Adivasi studies, and all parties interested in Adivasis' wellbeing, I suggest, need to pay closer attention to, and incorporate into their future work, for everyone's benefit.

One element of the first aspect of post-indigenous Adivasi realities in Gudalur that I observed during my fieldwork is the generational disconnect between the "educated" (a highly problematic term in its own right) younger generation, and the less "educated" older generation.

Intergenerational gaps

Fieldwork diary, 24/04/2010, Theppakadu

Experienced a significant moment today when Priya and I were walking towards Theppakadu II. A very old woman was sitting in the grass on the side going towards the river. When we walked past her, she stopped us, asking us with accusing eyes whether we had not seen her. Priya then talked to her and it emerged that the old woman was asking for money. Priya then turned to me, "She did not even realise that I am an Adivasi too [the old woman was also a Bettakurumba]. She thought I was a foreigner." What struck me was the fact that the old woman said that she did not have anyone to look after her, which is unusual in tribal societies.

Fieldwork diary, 09/04/2010, Gudalur

Chathi staged an interesting impro play with the teacher trainees and kids in school today (Vishnu was particularly intimidating as a Chetty landlord). First he grouped everyone into families. The Chetty landlord was making the Paniyas work without a break for breakfast. Then the AMS animators arrived, followed by the health and education animators. They took the kids to school, treated patients, etc., culminating in an enactment of the land rights demonstration. Everyone got up and formed a neat crocodile, chanting "Jay, jay, zindabad!". For a non-Adivasi like myself it was fascinating to see how AMS/ACCORD are trying to reconnect the tribal youngsters with AMS history, especially how they are trying to mend the intergenerational rift that has developed between the first generation of activists and present-day Adivasi youth, who are enjoying the benefits that their parents fought for and achieved.

A lament I often heard Mari express is that it is precisely their development interventions that have created not only the cultural erosion they have tried to battle right from the start, but also the kind of previously non-existent intergenerational hierarchies that exist nowadays between, for instance, a young and inexperienced Adivasi BA graduate and the "wiser" older Adivasi generation of "walking encyclopaedias" (Mari). This is echoed by Tilche (2011: 57) who observes that "while trying to erode existing divisions, the Academy was also creating new hierarchies of its own".

Intergenerational divisions in Adivasi societies are one aspect of post-indigenous life realities that are characterised by a "politics unlimited".

"Politics unlimited"

Chakrabarty (2006: 242) writes of the "politics unlimited" Adivasis are having to follow in their struggle for survival:

> The real-life politics of those groups in India who are actual or potential claimants to the "indigenous" identity, on the other hand, follow the logic of what I […] have called 'politics unlimited' [or the 'politics of desperation', my addition]. This is the idea that the poor or the oppressed, in pursuit of their rights, have to adopt every means at hand in order to fight the system that puts them down. […] [I]t implies […] a construction of the political that, in principle, has no limits. It does not submit itself to the procedures of academic knowledge. It is somewhat postmodern in that it uses names and words for their rhetorical rather than referential value.

As part of following a "politics unlimited", Adivasis strategically make use of postmodern political strategies in a hyperpostmodern age. Opportunistic, context-dependent movement tactics reflect and have to be extremely flexible and adaptive to the highly unstable environments they emerge from. The total conflation and active mixing of different movement ideologies (Liberation Theology, environmentalism, indigenism, anti-capitalism, etc.) and strategies (direct action, fundraising, participative capital investment strategy, etc.) in AMS/ACCORD seems to speak for such a "politics unlimited". Another example, I argue, is that of Adivasis' conforming to the symbolism of savagery, for instance, by getting drunk. This can present a means for them to reclaim such racism as a weapon in their rhetorical struggle, i.e. by subverting other people's Adivasi-discriminatory rhetoric to harness it for their own defence.

The craftiness and ingenuity of the use of Adivasi indigeneities (whether by the Dongria Kondhs in Niyamgiri or others), as tools to garner international and other support, and to form alliances by appealing to the imagination of those who might be forthcoming with support on the basis of indigenous rhetoric, is undeniable. Notwithstanding arguments about the commodification of indigenous cultures, and the instrumentalisation of indigenous knowledge

for inevitably politicised campaigns, Adivasis have no choice but to position themselves as the (understandably and justifiably) resourceful and resilient political actors they have to become, when faced with the threat of the destruction of their livelihoods and environment.

Adivasis are constantly pigeonholed according to different stereotypes. To try and understand this it is worth undertaking the mental exercise of imagining a total stranger thinking that s/he already knows everything about one. S/he thereby neither gives one the chance to introduce oneself, or her- or himself the chance to get to know the other. Stereotypes about Adivasis are no exception in this regard. Whether it is the invading company's uncouth junglee, the forest rights activist sanitised for international audiences, the model hard-working NGO worker, the noble savage, the ignorant jungle dweller, the backward tribal, the repository of ancient wisdom, the violent alcoholic, the loose whore, the morally more astute human – no human being or society could fulfil all of these stereotypes simultaneously. He or she would collapse under the weight of all these labels. Still, all of us, if forced to, would be very good at acting out all these different roles if our lives and livelihoods, and those of our loved ones, depended on it, pandering to the tastes of either those in power or whoever is willing to help us resist the powerful. Adivasis are no exception in this regard. The difference between Adivasis, in fact any persecuted minority, and other people is though, that many Adivasis find themselves in exceptionally difficult circumstances most of us have never, and will probably never have to face in our lives.

Ironically, I argue, it is through having to resort to such "politics unlimited" that Adivasis are in fact reclaiming self-representation unmediated by either the state, political parties, or NGOs.

Adivasis reclaiming Adivasi self-representation

In popular discourse, Adivasis emerge as the location of a fundamental critique of modernity itself. The question though is from whose point of view – disillusioned activists or Adivasis themselves? To recapitulate, I argue that the activists undermine their own indigenist utopia by negating post-indigenous Adivasi life realities and instead fashioning Adivasis according to their own idealised imaginaries, described above. AMS/ACCORD activists' grand postmodern project of helping Adivasis enter into a dialogue with modernity, "on their own terms", by aiding in the creation of alternative tribal modernities supposedly true to the innate ethos of Adivasi cultures, whatever that may be and whoever this may be determined by, thus has several problems.

I argue that the postmodern logic of "anything goes" does exactly what it says on the label – it allows the emptying of the Adivasi category of self-directed content, thereby turning it into a dustbin category to be filled by non-Adivasis with whatever ideological content is expedient for different causes, whether that is Development, political mobilisation, or victimisation. Adivasis may make similar rhetorical moves, however, they mostly do not have the political or material clout to do so. While it may be argued that, rhetorically, this is the natural progression of political and cultural identity constructions, what is often left out of the analysis are the real-life consequences of such ideological co-optation for the people thus left in the lurch. Whether Adivasis are denied or over-ascribed different external identities, this inhibits independent contemporary emic tribal identity formation processes and thus, ironically, the very process such external efforts purport to "save" – that of context-sensitive, meaning-full, ever-changing, ongoing culture making. The argument that the "saving" of cultures amounts to their calcification and thus ultimate atrophying is a well-rehearsed one, not least in protest by the people thus freeze-framed at a particular point in time and space. What is unfortunately often overlooked by over-zealous preservationists of "traditional" cultures are the opportunities cultural fluidity open up, to create culturally more sustainable Adivasi identities that are more responsive to present-day Adivasi needs. Adivasi identities which may, in fact, turn out to be post-indigenous.

In this regard, the crucial issue is for Adivasis to be able to move beyond external representations, whether this is eco-romanticism in the image of Rousseau's ideas, in which the Adivasi is the projected embodiment of an imaginary free state of nature (which clearly does not correspond to reality); right-wing extremism, in which the Adivasi is the lapsed Hindu in need of reco-opting into the Hindu fold; or Marxism, for which the Adivasi is the original class struggle hero, to name only a few examples. The first step in Adivasis' move beyond Rousseau, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, and Marx, I suggest, is the reclaiming of Adivasis' self-representation by Adivasis themselves.

An oft-celebrated and -cited example of South Indian Adivasi self-reclamation of political as well as territorial space is that of Muthanga in Wayanad, Kerala. Kjosavik (2006: 15) writes of this tribal land rights struggle in the district neighbouring Gudalur that,

> [i]t is important to understand that they were not reproducing the pre-existing adivasi institutions but reconstituting them, after sifting through and retaining what they perceived as the positive features and discarding the regressive ones, and at the same time embracing a new approach that transcended the inter-community hierarchies and incorporated gender concerns […] Evidently, they do not want to live in a frozen past, but rather in a dynamic future.

Practically then, in order for Adivasis to be able to reclaim self-representation, I argue that Adivasis need to produce counter-narratives to the dominant narratives of them out there. As Flynn (2008: 318) argues,

> [f]undamentally, the initiation and propagation of narrative is clearly a means of securing power and as such like any other, is subject to politicisation and unscrupulous subversion, by any potential interest group. […] Roe suggests that rather than attempting to combat existing narratives in the environmental sphere, it would be more productive to produce new counter-narratives that can better do justice to nuanced situations.

Accordingly, it is only the production of counter-narratives *by* Adivasis, I argue, that will be able to halt the perpetuation of and replace the many faulty narratives *about* Adivasis.

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From problematic Adivasi indigeneity imaginaries in Part II, I now turn to troublesome economics in Part III – specifically the contentious economics of Adivasi indigeneity narratives. In this third part, I analyse AMS/ACCORD's economics of indigeneity for its inconsistencies and argue that it is at odds with the economic reality of Adivasis in Gudalur.

Part III

Chai for change = chai for development? The economics of Adivasi indigeneity narratives

Fieldwork diary, 24/09/2009, conversation with C.R. Sathyanarayanan, Pondicherry

According to C.R. Sathyanarayanan, appointed head of the Tribal Research Centre at Ooty, the Mullukurumbas are the only group that are themselves assertive. They separated from "Thekaekara" because they realised he was only making money.
How much did he withhold after I said I was going to work for AMS/ACCORD? How can one tell who is really representing Adivasis of those who claim to?

Fieldwork diary, 19/7/2009, Mysore

Today, Viennie, the convenor of TAF (Tamil Nadu Adivasi Federation) told me that Adivasis are bypassing NGOs now. NGOs are perceived to have a mostly negative influence on Adivasis because of the funding issue.

Throughout this thesis I establish the fundamental link between indigeneity and economy. I argue that the adoption of indigeneity is a rhetorical strategy for economic survival. It is thus the particular intersection between identity politics and materiality I am interested in. The

point I make is that AMS/ACCORD use a particular, narrow conception of indigeneity to "indigenise" the tribal people in the Nilgiris they chose to work with from the 1980s. Since then, they have been lobbying for and building their economic self-reliance strategy on the basis of this exclusive indigeneity of "their" Adivasis. As Cederlöf and Sutton (2006: 161) confirm, tribal organisations in the Nilgiris are engaged in "exclusivist' politics" centred around narrow lobbying, predicated on, "the deployment of a proved membership of specific and reified identities".

Furthermore, I argue that the activists realise the production of this particular form of Adivasi indigeneity, firstly, through narrativisation. Secondly, these Adivasi indigeneity narratives are then disseminated throughout AMS/ACCORD's Development network. In particular, the activists employ value-driven storytelling, i.e. the foregrounding of supposedly tribal values in their stories about Adivasis. This emphasises the nature of Development work as a "moral discipline". The strong moralising current, ostensibly originating in Adivasis' own superior human value systems, in turn underwrites the need to preserve these values. According to the activists, such preservation of these values can best be brought about by infusing the new economic livelihood means, which Adivasis are having to adapt to deal with modernity, and which the activists are helping Adivasis to develop, with precisely these "age-old" tribal values. In the process, at least in theory, this should create not only an economic base for the Adivasis, in the modern sense of income from wage labour, but also a "new" economic system. This would be an economic system based on tribal "wisdom", for instance, that is fairer than current Fair Trade arrangements, and should benefit not only Adivasis, but also other disadvantaged communities and, by extension, the whole of humanity, according to the activists.

In this third part I now critically scrutinise AMS/ACCORD's conceptual marriage of Adivasi indigeneity and economic self-reliance. First, I briefly discuss the role of narrative – as in producing "developing fictions" – in Adivasi development. I then give examples for the marketisation of the indigenous Adivasi in AMS/ACCORD, and subsequently critique this approach.

Developing fictions – Adivasi indigeneity narratives in Development

Development today is still reminiscent of nineteenth century social Darwinism (with its origins in social evolutionism), an "ideology [that] served imperial interests" by purporting that "the most civilized were destined to dominate the others" (van Schendel 2001: 21). Development has not been able to shake off the charge that it smacks of social engineering. In

terms of the tyranny of liberal democracy-oriented development interventions, there is no doubt that development as well as Development projects have been (very) damaging.

Both development and Development narrativisation of Adivasis, in terms of tribal backwardness, primitivism, economic ignorance, and protectionism, harkens back to colonial modes of justification of colonial intervention in tribal areas, through the narrativisation of tribals as "wild", and the accompanying establishment of the need to civilise them. One could argue that the only noticeable shift that has taken place since then is a linguistic one, in that the focus of such narrativisation has in the 21st century shifted from the subjects, the people themselves as carriers of tribalness, in colonial narrativisation, to tribal culture itself, as embodied by a heterogenous set of people. While tribality in the 19th century was thus fixed as an attribute ascribed to certain people (and only them), in order to justify intervention in their lives, Adivasiness in the 21st century is a fluid concept that can – with the proper narrative toolset, in the postmodern vain, as argued above – be (re)constructed and appropriated by tribal and non-tribal people alike, for instance, in order to try and effect a change in economic circumstances, as is the case for AMS/ACCORD.

In the narrative reworking of Adivasi indigeneity for Development ends of the AMS/ACCORD activists, however, I argue, Adivasiness becomes a conceptual straightjacket. Because of its exclusivist nature described above, it is too limiting as a cultural concept. Because of its essentialist nature, it is too prescriptive as a truly emancipatory political tool. And as I show below, it also exhibits conceptual shortcomings as regards economic development.

Still, as previously argued, indigeneity never works only one way. In this regard it is similar to what Mosse (2005) avers for Development processes – that they are, in actual fact, more of a give-and-take, rather than just a having-foisted-upon. Project-"affected" recipients usually have a good idea of how to convert the influx of money and patronage to their advantage. As Mosse (2011: 155) shows for Bhil Western India, "Adivasis enrol outsiders onto *their* agenda and, through their 'consumer practices', consent to development interventions making something quite different of them (de Certeau 1984)". He further notes that "Bhil villagers (initially elites) were skilled manipulators and adept translators of idiosyncratic local and personal interests (in wage labour, wells, pumps, loans) into legitimate demands" (Mosse 2011: 161).

What is equally significant is that Development projects have very different impacts than the ones originally intended. As Mosse (2011: 154) again writes, "[n]ational or international development policy only works if it is translated into the different ambitions and intentions of

those bureaucrats or beneficiaries who it enrols". The trick on the policy-level though is to uphold the illusion that it is in fact policy determining practice, rather than practice running away with policy. "To be effective at this, a high degree of ambiguity and interpretive flexibility has to be built into the language of policy itself" (Mosse 2011: 155). Similarly, the Gudalur activists, in their narrativisation of Adivasis, make reality fit their imaginaries, rather than the other way round. The conceptual flexibility of indigeneity allows them to perform the narrative twisting necessary to turn tribality into Adivasiness, and to render this Adivasiness amenable to Development. The concept of indigeneity lends itself well to such a project, precisely because of its conceptual fuzziness. Tribality, however, offers less interpretative flexibility and harbours too many conflictual elements, as seen, for instance, in the inter-tribal conflicts previously unbeknown to the activists that surface periodically.

What we find then, is a constant contest of narratives and counter-narratives. Faulty narratives such as the one of Adivasi indigeneity are constantly contested by counter-narratives. The activists' narrative work consists in the continual adaptation of their Adivasi narratives to maintain coherence. They are simultaneously engaged in fictionalising Adivasi Development and Developing Adivasi fictions. For this they have developed a Development-appropriate marketing approach to promote their version of the indigenous Adivasi.

Marketing the indigenous Adivasi

Development activists such as Stan (in particular) pursue an "empowerment marketing" approach, i.e. of "giving" Gudalur Adivasis a new story that is "marketable". As Sachs (2012b) writes,

> [e]very marketer is looking to tap into the zeitgeist, and there is no more direct way into it than through the void created by fraying myths. This is where anxiety is welling up. This is where people are looking for therapeutic relief. This is where new ritual is ripe for the making. […] The first tactic of empowerment marketing is perhaps the most powerful: tell a more resonant truth in the face of commonly accepted lies. […] The second tactic of empowerment marketing emphasizes power of the audience, casting the viewer [and listener] as the hero with brand or organization as a helper, speeding her on her way. […] The final tactic of empowerment marketing comes down to this: inspired citizens make better brand evangelists than helpless consumers.

Stan once relayed how he "sold" the JC story to enthusiastic and "gullible" UK volunteers. Though I would not go as far as saying that AMS/ACCORD are capitalising on the West's gullibility, they are turning some of the consumer trends existing in the West, such as the preference for sourcing products directly from producers, and the desire to gain hands-on Development experience – whether as doctors or in other capacities – to their advantage. Examples for this are the sale of Just Change soap and tea via the JCUK trading network in

the UK, Amnesty International, and New Internationalist; the Development course "Development from the Inside", and the medical elective programme at the Adivasi Hospital. AMS/ACCORD are savvy about selling their "story", i.e. the story about the indigenous Adivasis of Gudalur, to the West. I personally do not think the Adivasis of this region (and for that matter elsewhere in India) would have been able to reclaim their land, plant tea, start selling this tea to other communities in India and abroad, start a school, start a hospital, and start a cultural centre without the help and intervention of ACCORD. Still, in official correspondence and for donor purposes (especially international), it is always the AMS and the Adivasis that are foregrounded and, most importantly, portrayed as the initiators and realisers of projects, whereas in reality it is blatantly not so. I argue that this amounts to a prioritisation of the indigenous Adivasi because of its perceived advantage in securing (especially international) funding. As Kjosavik (2006: 5) writes,

> [h]ierarchies and the politics of difference were strategically played down in a process of articulation that was initially facilitated by non-adivasi activists. The image of the adivasis as a monolithic entity was projected to the audience – the state and the hegemonic social groups. This was a tactical move to impress upon the audience their (adivasis') imminent power as political subjects and as a social force. 'Original inhabitant' was the lynchpin around which their identities were then articulated.

In the post-colonial and postmodern context in which Development agencies have to constantly re-evaluate and recraft their policies (Mosse 2005), policy fashions come and go in waves. Self-directed and people-led Development initiatives are currently in vogue. What adds even more "value" is if these Development efforts are headed by so-called "indigenous" peoples, since indigenous denotes a category of people worthy of "special" protection, on the basis of their "special" moral values. The rhetorical foregrounding of indigeneity in AMS/ACCORD thus serves very specific Development goals. That the activists employ only a very narrow conception of Adivasi indigeneity, is legitimised with the tangible economic benefits derived for those designated as indigenous.

The point I have been making throughout this thesis then, is that it pays to claim indigeneity. As Flynn (2008: 314) observes,

> [h]umans have sought narratives for thousands of years and it could be argued that it is this same desire for simplified versions of complex realities coupled with a desire for purgation that powers environmental narratives today. A more cynical perspective, however, might point to the resources that have been acquired under the banner of narrative; the all-encompassing legitimation that a well constructed narrative can 'deliver'." [and therefore "pays off"]

By this I do not only mean Adivasis being portrayed as hapless victims to evoke protectionist urges on the part of the more powerful and charitably inclined, even though this is a potent element of AMS/ACCORD's narrative strategy. What is even more significant, I

argue, is that a story pays off by establishing stakeholderdom. Narratives claim space. Myths of origin, such as the Paniya Ippimalai story, when invoked by the activists, are narratives of the confluence of time and space in a particular place, intended to assert the anteriority and hence rightful claim to these places. This is an ideological as well as a material claim. Activists' narrative transformation of landless tribals into economically self-reliant Adivasi original inhabitants and tea producers is a story not only literally staking out a tea plantation owned by Adivasis, but also staking out an ideological space, both in the local narrative landscape of the Nilgiris and the international Development literature. I argue that the more and the better the crisis narratives, the more an elite, such as the activists, appears to be able to establish a claim to the resources it maintains are necessary to deal with a crisis. Accordingly, the more uncertainty, the more and better stories are needed to deal with this uncertainty. Good narratives determine survival matters.

"Good" Adivasi narratives derive their quality, inter alia, from the positive cultural uniqueness imputed to Adivasis, and the concomitant need to "preserve" these attributes, for the benefit of both Adivasis and non-Adivasis. This, however, I argue, can be an inherently extractive process along the dichotomy culture-rich/material poverty – cultural poverty/material affluence.

The culture-rich/material poverty – cultural poverty/material affluence dichotomy

Tourism, Development aid, and other extractive processes, I contend, can be characterised by the culture-rich/material poverty – cultural poverty/material affluence dichotomy (I refrain from using wealth for the latter for several different reasons, one of them being the non-material aspects of the concept of wealth). In this model, Adivasis represent the culture-rich/material poverty aspect, while Development NGO staff represent the cultural poverty/material affluence position. Development, as practiced by the non-Adivasi Gudalur activists, as a culturally disadvantaged or challenged activity, often originates in a culturally impoverished middle-class background. As Ghosh (2006: 529) writes, in 21st century capitalist consumerism, "the primitive's 'difference' is turned into a 'value' that is consumed by the [usually more affluent] multicultural citizen". AMS/ACCORD-related examples are the marketing of the tea produced by them as "Adivasi" or tribal tea (their "USP", in neoliberal capitalist speak), the reworking of Adivasi ways of life for UK geography curricula, and the marketing of their forest produce in cooperatives such as Just Change (keywords value addition, cooperativisation).

Consequently, Development draws on its "beneficiaries"'/recipients' cultural wealth for its own maintenance and flourishing. The activists thereby (indirectly if not directly) benefit from the Adivasis (an aspect often kept under wraps), by using the cultural wealth of the culturally rich, but materially poor tribals, for the funnelling of material resources (primarily) to Adivasis, but also to the non-Adivasis involved with them. This pre-supposes the Adivasis' agreement to, or at least their tacit acquiescence to the exploitation of their cultural wealth in the service of Development. In this, certain sections of the tribal population in India are more willing to use their cultural wealth as a means of attracting material resources than others.

Next, I posit that narrative – in this case AMS/ACCORD's stories about the tribes and AMS/ACCORD's renderings of tribal stories – can be conceptualised as a form of material culture constituting the cultural wealth of Adivasis, which becomes a form of tradeable resource or currency in Development transactions. This throws up the question of what is marketable as "culture", and in particular "indigenous culture", in the context of Development. In order to turn Adivasi narratives into marketable assets for Development purposes, conceptual and perceptual shifts are necessary. These shifts often involve (mostly harmful) essentialisation, exoticisation, and othering of tribal cultures.

A context where the othering and reification of tribal cultures in the process of their marketisation is the norm, is tourism. For tourism purposes, as in the noble savage discourse, Adivasis are purified, by purging their lived realities of their unsavoury aspects (such as poverty, alcoholism, perceived cultural complexity and impenetrability, non-Hindu social mores, sexual licentiousness, non-Christian religious adherance, etc., depending on one's standpoint). Adivasis are thus turned into hollowed-out, prefabricated human stencils, to be used for different purposes according to context, onto which idealised forms of tribal culture are projected. An example for this is a tourism advert run in 2011, inter alia in an inflight magazine (where I discovered it) as part of the "Incredible !ndia" tourism campaign. The main text covers almost the entire gamut of tribal stereotypification and othering – ancestrality, primordialness, virginity, innocence, purity, pristineness, simplicity, the accumulation and embodiment of history (thus representing non-Adivasis' pre-history), infantilisation, the rejection of material in favour of non-material wealth, the celebration of life, the gloriousness of pre-modernity versus the squalor of modernity (and postmodernity), and so forth:

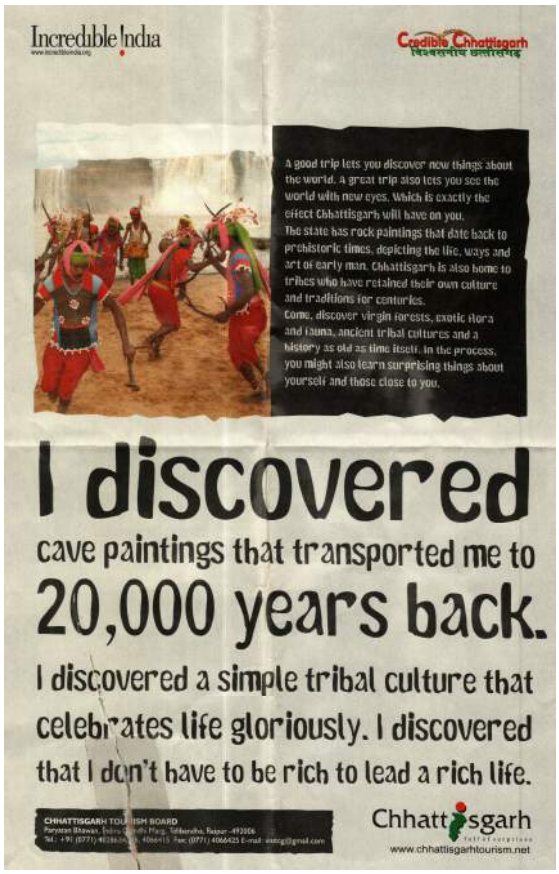

Illustration 30 "'Credible' Chhattisgarh" tourism advert

Such conceptualisations of the materially impoverished Adivasi as a repository of cultural wealth are not only prone to unilateral extraction, but also regimes of exclusive access.

Exclusive and excluding access

There is an ambivalence to the fact that, on the one hand, AMS/ACCORD pursue a protection through isolation politics, i.e. the claim that tribal ethnicity is not easily compatible with market principles and capitalism, while, on the other, they actively promote and market their own idea of Adivasi uniqueness, and have introduced Adivasis to capitalist modes of production.

A common financial rationale in NGO/visitor interactions is the "pay for it and receive privileged access to information" strategy. This is a clever and financially opportunistic way of handling foreign interest in NGOs because they are often the first point of access for foreign researchers, who are mostly perceived as information leeches. In this process, AMS/ACCORD (or one of its various offshoots such as the Vishwa Bharathi Vidyodaya School and Trust), as an organisation representing tribal peoples, acts as an intermediary between Adivasis and those interested in Adivasis. As exemplified by the process through which the village Chembakolli became the central pivot around which ActionAid's involvement with AMS/ACCORD revolves (see the case study in the chapter "Stories of self-

reliance"), I question, however, how much the people, i.e. the Adivasis, actually know about what goes on at the level of interactions with international partners, and how much of a say they really have in processes that are very alien to some members of the different tribal communities. Mosse (2011: 160) similarly observes, for a DfID-funded project in Western India, that "it would not be surprising to discover that Bhil villagers were unaware that these exercises were all about privileging *their* knowledge". Examples for this in AMS/ACCORD are the blog for the Chembakolli website (supposedly written by the Vidyodaya Adivasi children, but in in actual fact by NGO staff), and the teaching pack produced by ActionAid for use in UK schools, developed out of materials gathered in Chembakolli. Significantly, when I showed this teaching pack to the Adivasi Vidyodaya school children, none of them had seen it before. Naturally, they were intrigued by what had been written about them and the pictures of them in the pack.

For privileged, paid-for access then, the "authentically" and "purely" tribal about Adivasis, which serves as the narrative fuel for the marketing and marketisation of Adivasis, has to be closely guarded, in order to preserve the narrative integrity and thus credibility of this narrative. This involves, for instance, restricting and closely monitoring physical access of non-NGO related people to tribal villages in forest interiors. As a result, the people living in these villages are subject to multiple forms of surveillance and control of their productive resources – from the non-state side by NGOs (who covet their culture) and settlers, MNCs, etc. (who deprive them of their land), and from the state side by the Forest Department (who again claim their land and restrict access to their forest livelihood base). Such politics of access to tribal villages, i.e. who was and who was not allowed to go to tribal villages, was particularly interesting to observe in AMS/ACCORD. Those with a particular purpose, such as doctors, development experts, representatives from donor agencies (e.g. a Christian Aid employee during my time in Gudalur), and paying medical students from the UK and U.S were allowed, for instance, while others of lesser importance were not. The treatment of volunteers depended on their professional and/or economic benefit for the organisation. This was understandably, never openly acknowledged.

In this regard, I would like to make a few comments pertaining to the material relations between researcher(s) and researched. I imagine we would all like to be able to conduct research in a supportive environment that enables genuine collaboration between researcher(s) and those researched (and for these roles to be exchangeable), and creates results that benefit both sides. However, sadly, a lot of damage has been done in the past and is still being done, turning research in post-colonial contexts into more of a professional minefield, than an

opportunity for non-exploitative exchange of information and effective inter-cultural communication. The indisputable discrepancies in economic and cultural resources between researcher and researched almost inevitably create demands and expectations that cannot be met by either side. As much as we would like to deny it, the exploited can quickly turn into exploiters. From having had very intensive interactions with several volunteers (myself included in this category), I posit that organisations such as AMS/ACCORD have found a very lucrative and beneficial way of capitalising on the desire of some people in the Global North to "do good". This is mostly necessitated by the unequal North-South Development relationships NGOs in the South find themselves in. The great paradox NGOs face is that they are financially dependent on the very mechanisms they position themselves against. Accordingly, AMS/ACCORD activists most often expressed disgust at, firstly, national apathy and, secondly, reliance on quasi-colonial international connections for funding (that are often still informed by quasi-colonial mindsets).

Given how questionable some aspects of AMS/ACCORD economics of indigeneity are, and how these, at the same time, have their origin in the very same unjust economic structures AMS/ACCORD/JC are trying to change, it would seem that AMS/ACCORD are (inadvertently and unvoluntarily) reproducing the very same structures they claim to want to change, by adopting the extractive and excluding quasi-capitalist strategies described above. A more cynical view would of course be, that this presents merely the adoption of strategically more advantageous economic tactics, which is, after all, wholly permissible in a free-for-all capitalist economy, regardless of the lack of benefit it might have for others. This ambivalence – being torn between seeking to change the system and having to accept a certain degree of contingent capitulation to dominant capitalist ideology – is the central dilemma activists such as those of AMS/ACCORD face.

Despite their best efforts, it is therefore questionable, I argue, whether "Chai for change" in fact equals "Chai for development". Regrettably, self-reliance à la Gudalur does not always amount to an economics as if Adivasis mattered. This is the case both because of macro-economic circumstances, and because AMS/ACCORD's thinking on Adivasis exhibits fundamental flaws that throw dangerous spanners in the works of creating truly Adivasi self-directed self-reliance.

Adivasi self-reliance à la Gudalur: an economics as if Adivasis – and people – mattered?

"[T]here is no word for exploitation in Adivasi languages".
Mahasweta Devi (1993: 118)

Fieldwork diary, 10/04/2010, Theppakadu

Priya told me today that she does not want to work for ACCORD because she would not be able to support her family from their low salary.

What do AMS/ACCORD want us to believe we can learn from Adivasis? According to the activists, these are the classic eco-socialist tenets of cooperation instead of competition; questions of scale (along the lines of E.F. Schumacher's "Small is beautiful"); that there is enough on this planet for everyone's needs, but not for everyone's greed (M.K. Gandhi); and ideas along the lines of the "Vision for Development" according to the first batch of students of the postgraduate Tribal Studies diploma programme at the Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh, Gujarat, summarised by G.N. Devy (2006: 133-142).

Consistently, however, these idealist notions of the activists about Adivasi development run up against harsh economic realities. AMS/ACCORD have undoubtedly made an impact and effected social change in the Gudalur valley – however, mostly not the kind they had intended. The introduction of a capitalist mode of production completely changed the Gudalur Adivasi economy. By growing things they could only afford to sell, instead of eat, Adivasis linked themselves to the market, thereby partially losing control over their livelihoods. On the basis of this, I argue that the preservation of tribal otherness is incommensurate with bringing its bearers in contact with private property and market exchanges. Prasad (2003: 74) notes that tribal welfare has always been used as a prime mechanism to change tribal societies. In a sense then, I posit, AMS/ACCORD have (inadvertently) effected precisely what the state intended to do all along, with its mission to bring Adivasis into the time of capital. As previously mentioned, the activists are only too aware of this themselves. They fear that they may have caused in part exactly what they had wanted to prevent. Mari, for instance, once told me they wanted to start traditional meetings in the villages again. This was, however, difficult now because people worked six days a week as tea pickers, as a result of which they only had time to meet in the evenings. In this context, Flynn (2013: 16) expresses a theme similar to the one prevalent in Gudalur, in relation to the MST – that people are neglecting their contribution to the movement and their political duties because of work demands: "Both Davi and Jurema commented on how such was the focus on work and meeting the contract, that in fact, people had forgotten about the wider struggle." This is a sentiment echoed by the Gudalur activists, who regularly lamented that the wider movement struggle had been sacrificed for wage-labour dependency.

The imagined ideal of tribal territorial sovereignty coupled with economic self-reliance thanks to tea, as envisaged by the activists, is therefore at odds with today's economic reality of Adivasis in Gudalur, I argue. Consequently, I suggest, in the following final reflections, that the "Chai for change" story may have to be rewritten to take account of the intersections between the multiple layers of marginalisations Adivasis face, in Gudalur and beyond.

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Interlude

In Part I of this chapter I analysed the concerns and contradictions of NGO life in AMS/ACCORD. This led me to disentangle, in Part II, the disjunctures between activist imaginaries of Adivasi indigenousness and tribal life realities in Gudalur. In Part III, I investigated the economics of Adivasi indigeneity narratives. I now arrive at the conclusion of this thesis, "Some closing thoughts – telling another story of Adivasi intersectionality in Gudalur…", with the intention of addressing the issue of Adivasi intersectionality, in order to offer suggestions that may be able to contribute to conceptualising different, possible ways forward for the Adivasi movement in Gudalur.

SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

Telling another story of Adivasi intersectionality in Gudalur…

> *"The voiceless do not need a voice, but modernity [that] needs a hearing aid."*
> Mahasweta Devi (quoted by Shiv Viswanathan, cited in Sawhney 2009: 385)

Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011a: 9) highlight how "imaginaries [of belonging] may […] become embroiled within interconnected patterns of imperialism and anti-imperialism, colonisation and de-coloniality, global capitalism and decentralised development." In this thesis I analysed how one such set of such "imaginaries of belonging", in the form of narratives of Adivasi indigeneity, converge in one ethnographic locality, Gudalur. At the same time, I showed how these localised stories of Adivasi indigenousness are reflective of the multiplicity of divergent Adivasi subjectivities, competing and contradicting each other, not only in the contemporary Indian polity, but above all, also in the transnational global citizensphere that co-constitutes Adivasi lifeworlds.

Thesis synopsis

In this thesis I provided a narrative-focussed study of Adivasi indigeneity narratives in Development. I told a story about stories of "chai for change" – an Adivasi-led economic revolution on the basis of tribal claims to land and to the tea plantation economy in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, South India. These are stories of Adivasi self-reliance, Adivasi indigeneities, and Adivasi activism. I demonstrated how conflictual notions of Adivasi indigeneity, harnessed for "Development" ends by Development activists, often become unravelled and entangled in tensions and contradictions, like a snarled-up ball of narrative yarn. I argued that the social activists try to offset this tendency by continually adapting and improving the Adivasi indigeneity narratives in their stories, in an attempt to attract ever new and different audiences to their Development network.

At the outset of this thesis, in the chapter "Some opening thoughts", I posited that the indigenisation of Adivasis fulfils different objectives in the field of Development practice and international "aid" processes. I argued that the Development activists of AMS/ACCORD/Just Change I follow in this story achieve, or attempt to achieve, these objectives through the narrativisation of Adivasi indigeneity.

In the chapter, "Behind the scenes – methods and tools", I sketched out the methodological foundation of this thesis and offered my insights on the practicalities of doing a multi-sited ethnography of Adivasi activism and Development NGOs in South India, the UK, and Germany.

Subsequently, in the chapter "Stories of Adivasi self-reliance", I analysed, first, how the Adivasi communities of the Gudalur valley in the Nilgiris, try to attain and consolidate the sustainability and permanence of their, and other disadvantaged communities', economic self-reliance. Secondly, I examined how the social activists who are engaged with these Adivasi groups, try to realise such economic self-reliance through creating a new, fairer, and more sustainable economic system, on the basis of supposedly indigenous/tribal/Adivasi values. Thirdly, I showed how these Development activists connect the different actors involved in these self-reliance efforts, via narratives of Adivasi indigeneity.

In the chapter "Stories of Adivasi indigeneities", I then argued that the activists manage to enlist the large group of different Development actors – and the financial support they provide – necessary for such a "poetically just" shift in economic relations, through the harnessing of a particular brand of Adivasi indigeneity in their stories. This particular conceptualisation of indigeneity corresponds largely to essentialised, eco-romanticist imaginaries of "the indigenous", and therefore "the Adivasi", that the different actors in AMS/ACCORD's Development network hold. They base these Adivasi indigeneity imaginaries on internationally current, reified notions of indigeneity, derived largely from non-native representations of Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians, and marginally, Maori, and various Latin- and South American indigenous peoples. Through first identifying the dominant elements of the AMS/ACCORD-specific Adivasi indigeneity narratives, and then analysing the pitfalls inherent in these narratives, I brought to light the inconsistencies between activist-imagined Adivasi indigeneity narratives, and the multiplicity of actual, contemporary, conflicting identities of Gudalur's different tribal peoples.

Following my identification of the dominant activist Adivasi indigeneity narratives and my analysis of their contradictions, I argued, in the chapter "Stories of chai for change?", that, on the one hand, the efforts of the Adivasi activists followed in this story to create a new, fairer, and more sustainable economic system, informed by Adivasi values, do not always, despite their best intentions, amount to a modern tool to help sustain a progressive and self-reliant Adivasi movement. I observed that even though the AMS/ACCORD activists aspire to thinking with the logics and societal frames of Adivasi communities, they often fall short of their own aspirations. On the other hand, I posited that the activists' rhetorical strategy of jumping on the indigenist rhetoric bandwagon is of only limited usefulness for Adivasis, to overcome economic inequalities (re)enforced and (re)produced by the complex intermeshing of ethnicity and caste in India. I contended that indigenism's anachronistic elements – in particular the activists' adherence to an ecologically romantic conceptualisation of Adivasi

values, rooted in an externally imagined golden past – often renders the activists' rhetorical strategies counterproductive, and thereby creates obstacles to sustaining the momentum of the Gudalur Adivasi movement.

Specifically, I argue that indigenism is not always a helpful strategy for dealing with Adivasi intersectionality – understood as the intersection of the multiple forms of discrimination Adivasis face – because of indigenism's exclusive and essentialising tendencies. I now return to this question of how Adivasi movements and organisations can tackle the issue of Adivasi intersectionality, without resorting to only narrow identity-based politics, predicated on archaic notions of Adivasi indigeneity, that do not reflect post-indigenous Adivasi realities.

Addressing Adivasi intersectionality

Kjosavik (2011: 121) uses the concept of intersectionality to argue an indigenist standpoint epistemology. For her, intersectionality offers "an interpretative framework for thinking through how intersections of class and indigeneity shape the experiences of indigenous peoples across social and geographical contexts". Accordingly, taking intersectionality into account, I ask whether AMS/ACCORD's narrative-intensive indigenism is a useful strategy for dealing with Adivasi intersectionality, and intersectionality's wider ramifications for Adivasis' economic survival at the beginning of the 21st century.

A favourite story of Stan's, one I heard many times during my time in Gudalur, told as a form of substitution story for describing the (overall) success of their income-generation efforts (mainly through the production and sale of tea) since the 1980s, is one about the moment when – talking to an audience of young Adivasis – he realised that, unlike their parents' generation, these youngsters no longer knew first-hand the experience and meaning of hunger. The fact that Adivasis in Gudalur today no longer face life-threatening hunger (a former rallying point during the early days of the movement) is representative of the wider class and identity changes, and concomitant shifts in local power relations that AMS/ACCORD's economic self-reliance drive has effected. This has been a change in Gudalur Adivasis' relations to the means of production, and thus economic status, from one generation to the next. As elsewhere, this shift to a market-dependent livelihood base has, however, not only had the positive effect of increased material prosperity, but has also engendered new forms of marginalisations, vulnerabilities, and dependencies. Not only has it brought on the production of new ways of life that demand of young Adivasis the development of new cultural identities different to their parents' pre-industrial subjecthoods,

but it has also generated new forms of economic and cultural alienation and discrimination for todays's young Adivasi generation. Despite the change in their education status, young Adivasis find themselves having to compete in highly competitive urban labour markets, where they still face historically rooted, and in fact intensified, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and caste. I argue that it is questionable whether AMS/ACCORD's particular Adivasi-identity-based movement strategy can address such intersectionality.

Widening narrative gaps

AMS/ACCORD posit themselves as a movement that tries to find systemic solutions to systemic crises. In light of the shifts in Adivasi identity just described, and the narrative inconsistencies of activist imaginings of Adivasi personhood discussed throughout this thesis, it is thus pertinent to ask whether AMS/ACCORD are (still) relevant to tribals in Gudalur. Do its movement policies reflect present-day tribal life actualities? Or are they losing out to more "attractive" NGOs and other competitors (the market, religious groups, political parties, etc.)? Consequently, the question arises how the movement itself will change as a result of this. Will it be able to redefine and consolidate the issues it seeks to tackle, i.e. to meet the demand for the constant reinvention of its narrative, in order to be able to move on, or not? It remains to be seen whether AMS/ACCORD will continue to be relevant for Gudalur's Adivasis.

Based on my observations, I argue that there is too much of a mismatch between imagined Adivasiness, and reality, for activist Adivasi narratives to be useful for Gudalur's Adivasis, on a long-term basis, both in substance, as well as in practical application. In terms of substantive content, the current activist Adivasi narrative cannot be sustained narratively if the stories it tells of its protagonists do not actually match these protagonists' actual lives (any more). In terms of implementation, AMS/ACCORD's Adivasi indigeneity-based Development work necessitates the constant reinvention and feeding of new stories into their Development narrative network, to maintain narrative coherence and consistency, and therefore the flow of financial capital through the dissemination of narrative capital. Conversely, the demand for new stories, on the part of Development actors, to maintain interest and prevent narrative fatigue, leads to pressure to continuously create new narratives that cater to the changing tastes of AMS/ACCORD's changing audiences. This, of course, points to the skewed power imbalances still inherent in Development processes that AMS/ACCORD so heavily criticise and try to change. Whether AMS/ACCORD will be able to keep up this constant narrative reinvention of Adivasi indigeneity is questionable because the gap between indigenist imaginations and actual indigenous subjects is ever widening.

Adivasi counter-narratives

In order to attempt to overcome this gap, I suggest a need for modified Adivasi narratives, i.e. a need for the reworking of the Adivasi indigeneity tropes currently in use by the activists, both in India as well as transnationally. This is essential, I argue, in order to take account of those aspects of Adivasi identities currently at the edges of activists' narrative spectrum, i.e. the contemporaneous ones – in fact, those the activists currently mask in their eco-indigenist imaginaries. As we have seen, conflictual notions of Adivasi indigeneity harnessed for "Development" ends by Development activists often become – yarn-like – unravelled and entangled in tensions and contradictions. These the social activists try to offset by continual narrative improvement of their stories for new and different audiences. The key now is for the activists to disentangle their Adivasi indigeneity narratives in such a way that their content is not determined by the activists, but by Adivasis themselves.

Demonopolising representational space

As Kjosavik (2011: 130) demonstrates, indigeneity has a clear normative quality – that the people thus designated ought not to have been oppressed, and that this historical wrong can be corrected through a political struggle predicated on the reconscientisation of tribals with indigeneity's essentialist tenets. In the same manner, for the Gudalur activists, indigeneity has a clear political and material telos – to help redress historical injustice by harnessing an ideological construct to acquire the necessary financial means in the present to attempt to ensure future economic self-reliance, and thus avoid the repetition of economic injustice. It is through the refashioning of Gudalur's historically dispossessed tribals, and the unification of formerly disparate tribes into indigenous Adivasi communities, embodying globally relevant messages for humanity, spread through the telling of stories about these "Adivasis" to receptive audiences, that the activists have so far sought to achieve this self-reliance **for** the Adivasis. At the same time, we have seen that, even after 30 years (1984-2014), this self-reliance has remained a dream. Whether self-reliance was possibly chiefly a rhetorical strategy all along, to legitimise continued NGO presence, is a question I already posed. Assuming it was not, however, I argue that it is in the aspiration to achieve self-reliance **for** someone, i.e. to try and achieve something for someone that can ultimately, by definition, only be achieved by struggle on one's own – i.e. self-reliant – terms, that we may find the answer to the lack of success in achieving the kind of self-reliance the activists envision "for" the Adivasis. This may of course have several different reasons – for instance, that this vision is not shared by (all) the Adivasis themselves. Someone trying to help someone achieve self-

reliance pre-supposes the continued presence and intervention of this first person, despite possible asseverations to the contrary of this first entity. In this regard, the Gudalur activists positioned themselves as the mediators between the Adivasis and the audiences receptive to their plight, and connected these two formerly separate spheres through "mobilising" and "activating" stories that set the cash flow in motion. They monopolised this narrative space through the exclusivity of their interpretative skills (as in, for instance, having the requisite language skills to interpret between actors in English, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, and the tribal languages), and the ability to convert tribal lifeworlds into internationally digestable narratives about indigenous values. AMS/ACCORD also did this by claiming exclusive representation rights through actively discouraging tribal self-representation, as witnessed during my fieldwork, when they tried to curtail interactions of "their" Adivasis (esp. Adivasis they had trained) with outsiders that they had not sanctioned, because AMS/ACCORD deemed them to be harmful for "their" Adivasis (this pertained especially to interactions with researchers):

Fieldwork diary, 08/05/2010, Gudalur

Met up with Oriana Reid-Collins, from Colorado, today, a linguist at University of Aix-en-Provence.
She is working on a project of the University of Munich to document endangered languages. The languages they are hoping to document are Kattunayakan, Mullu Kurumba, and Chola Naicken. She told me that another researcher based in Gudalur is working with Arun (of Shade of the Forest Tree Blog fame (Thekaekara 2008-09)), an ex-Vidyodaya Adivasi youngster, who has just finished his 12th standard exams in a government school and is now waiting for his results. He is hoping to go to college. She found it interesting how an English-medium education enables young Adivasi people to double up as research assistants. Significantly, he is the one Tarsh (Mari/Stan's first son) tried to dissuade from working with *firangi* (foreign) researchers.

Narrative co-operation instead of competition

To end then, I would like to propose, to all the different interest groups who have a stake in the Gudalur Adivasis' well-being, to consider two points: that their work for and on behalf of Adivasis, and by extension themselves, could be more relevant and effective if, on the one hand, the conceptual boundaries between the different actors – Adivasis, activists, development professionals, researchers, etc. – were made less oppositional, and, on the other hand, more concerted efforts were undertaken to overcome the narrative stalemate that has, to a certain extent, paralysed interactions between these actors, and thus their work, in the recent past. The point I am making is that there needs to be more and better communication between

Adivasis (particularly taking into account the importance and honouring the continuing relevance of tribal elders), activists, and scholars (all three of whom are overlapping categories). It would be helpful to remember one of the original reasons for AMS/ACCORD's initial success, i.e. of being able to connect so many different actors of such different origin, and mobilising their support, through the sharing of a *story* – a story that derives its popularity from being one of resistance vis-à-vis dominant oppression. I am conscious of the fact that the activists are acutely aware of these points themselves (and above all that they do not need an anthropologist like myself to tell them this – however, this is another matter), and that they seem to be undertaking every effort to counteract the atrophying of the narrative exchange that used to form the bedrock of their Development work. The reality, however, is that this story has in recent years, through institutionalisation, and the ever-expanding diversification of their activities and corresponding splintering of their funding base, become fragmented. This is mirrored by the competing narrative interests among their supporters, who, instead of pulling on one narrative string, have increasingly produced competing narratives, reflecting their competing material interests in the Gudalur Adivasis. The unwillingness of Just Change UK and the Adivasi Tee Projekt in Germany to work together, despite efforts (on my and other people's part) to connect the two groups over a number of years, is, for instance, testament to this tendency of narrative fragmentation. Everyone (of the different activists involved with AMS/ACCORD) wanting their exclusive share of the Adivasis, I argue, works out to everyone's disadvantage, both the Adivasis' and the activists' (which are overlapping and not exclusive categories, it has to reemphasised). In the mould of the cooperative spirit touted by the activists (JC's tagline being "connecting communities"), it would be valuable, I suggest, to reactivate a non-competitive flow of stories, and to plug the narrative leaks (see www.pluggingtheleaks.org), so that directly linking communities through Adivasi narratives can indeed become a source of mutual benefit for everyone.

Illustration 31 Plugging the leaks – a popular game played during JC workshops intended to demonstrate how to retain cash flow within a community. Source: Just Change India

Mari expresses this best herself in an email from 17 November 2011:

It's important now, more than ever, to put our differences aside and concentrate on what we've together built over the last 25 years and know that we need to put in place steps for it to continue without us…So aware that we can go anytime and we must groom others to take over in a democratic, healthy fashion…

Kjosavik (2006: 15) writes of the Muthanga struggle in neighbouring Wayanad:

> The image of the adivasis had been redefined through this [the Muthanga] struggle. As Kunhaman (2003: 66) succinctly states: 'The success of that struggle was the struggle itself'. The image of the 'helpless', 'illiterate' and 'uncivilized' adivasi has been replaced by the image of an adivasi who has been engaging in a militant struggle for their rights. Thus the adivasis redefined themselves through this struggle. The Muthanga struggle, therefore, cannot be reduced to a mere struggle for land; it came to symbolize a people's aspiration for a different future. The decision to occupy their ancestral lands in Muthanga had symbolic meanings as well as material implications.

To summarise the points I have made in these final reflections – in order to envision the possibility for the different future imagined for Adivasis, by both the activists and the Adivasis, to materialise for the Gudalur Adivasis, and to not only remain an aspiration – I have made several suggestions: a modification of AMS/ACCORD's narrow identity-based movement strategy in order to address Adivasi intersectionality, the bridging of the gap between indigenist imaginations and actual indigenous subjects, the demonopolisation of representational space, and the concomitant reclaiming of narrative agency by Adivasis. It is through this, I argue, that Gudalur's Adivasis may be able to redefine themselves in a way similar to their counterparts in Kerala. Above all though, I argue, it will take narrative co-

operation instead of competition, for the Gudalur Adivasi movement to be able to continue and thrive.

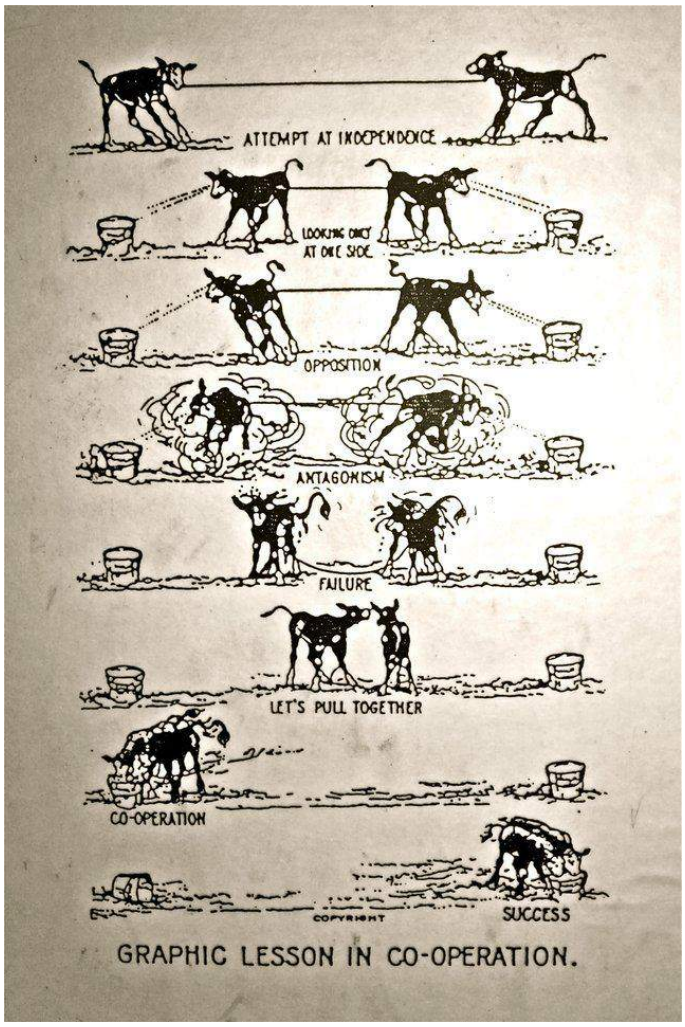

Illustration 32 Graphic lesson in co-operation, Beamish Museum. Photo: Claudia C. Aufschnaiter.

*

An audiovisual postscript

An Adivasi Munnetra Sangam film about honey gathering in the Gudalur valley: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_Pmio-mIZ0

*

Interlude

At the end of this thesis it is time for me, the anthropologist, to retreat from the rostrum, back into the shadows surrounding the storytelling fire, and to hand over the narrative baton to two Adivasi poets from two different regions in India, Chathi from Tamil Nadu, and Vahru Sonawane from Maharashtra, for two final stories in “Coming full circle – a story”. They bring this larger story to its cyclical conclusion.

Coming full story circle

"These religions are not sustainable. This world too will not survive for long if dog-eats-dog dogmatism continues. The world can build more empires and temples by snatching lives of the meek. Today, the meek are getting back at the empires — destruction, even if it costs self-destruction."
Ram Dayal Munda (Tehelka 2010)

I have told you a story about stories. These are stories that have been retold many times. And will (hopefully) be told again and again. I have simply added another version of the story about these stories to the existing canon. By the time I shall be putting the finishing touches to my version, it will once again be 5 December. Adivasi Day in Gudalur. 2014. May the story continue…

Bakhtin (1984 [1929]: 59) testifies to the ultimate unfinalisability of any human life. Intersubjectively, as well as literarily. In my writing, I have attempted to explain what the people in this story are trying to effect with their narratives. What their motives behind their storytelling may be, and how their storytelling affects other people in this story.

Stories sometimes have endings. People though, are open-ended…

I, the metanarratress, now clear the stage for the main storytellers of this story, the Adivasis, to have the final word …

Hello, my name is Chathi. I live in Chinath village in Ayyankolli area. I am from the Paniya tribe.

Photo: Claudia C. Aufschnaiter

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of our big demonstration, I want to tell you something about our history this week.

Before we formed the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam, many of us lived like slaves under non-tribal people. We used to work for them the whole day. In return we would get paid with rice. Men would get one and a half kilos and women just one kilo for the whole day's work. Even children used to work. We lived in fear. Our people were scared to meet strangers and people would hide if they saw a vehicle.

And then things changed after 1986. With the help of ACCORD, we formed village sangams (committees) to solve our problems. We used to have a lot of discussions. Initially we were only a few animators and worked as a team. We decided to visit all the villages.

We would speak to the people in our language and slowly got them to talk about the problems they are facing. We also talked about coming together and be united.

Photo: AMS/ACCORD

We formed a theatre group and took some basic training on acting. This group went from one village to another. We used to spend the night, as only then we could meet the people. We would find out the problems in that village by talking to some people in the day and then develop the story.

In the night, we would play music and when people would gather together we would do the play. The play would make them see the issues clearly and then we would discuss about the next step. (It is me on the right side. See, how young I was at that time!)

Photo: AMS/ACCORD

The demonstration on the 5th December 1998 did not happen just in one day. We held lot of meetings in the villages before that. We brought an Adivasi man – his face and body totally blackened – in chains to show our situation and he walked through the town in chain. This sight was very arresting and many people took notice of our protest.

Photo: AMS/ACCORD

The officials got nervous just looking at the number of Adivasis. No one could believe that thousands of Adivasis were living in the area as there were more than 10,000 Adivasis walking peacefully wearing the traditional white dress. The Adivasi Munnetra Sangam gave usÂ lots of courage to stand up against the injustice.

It is not only land. We also took up the issue of alcohol. Our Adivasi men were hired to brew alcoholic drinks. We made plays explaining the bad effects of alcohol. We would seize drums of alcohol and destroy them. We had to oppose the police sometimes as some of the policemen were supporting the people who made the alcoholic drinks.

Photo: AMS/ACCORD

Today we have come a long way. Our children are going to school. The children studying at the Vidyodaya School can speak English and are so confident. They are not afraid to talk to strangers.

As you can see in the photograph below, I have become very old now. But, there are young people who will take over things from people like me.

Photo: AMS/ACCORD

I am confident that our people will face the future challenges also together and stay united.

Bye, Chathi (AMS/ACCORD and ActionAid 2012)

*

Stage

We never went on the stage that was made in our name
They did not invite us
They pointed with their finger
And showed us our place
We sat there
They appreciated us
They were narrating to us
Our own vows and sorrows
Which were ours and never theirs
We had some doubts
We murmured
They heard us attentively and sighed
They twisted our ears and said –
Apologise … or you will be…

(Vahru Sonawane, translation from a Bhil dialect, cited in Basu 2011)

Acknowledgements

"Look at a stone cutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred-and-first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not the last blow that did it, but all that had gone before."
Jacob A. Riis

While being buffeted about by life continuing its course regardless of the fact that I was attempting to do a PhD, I was encouraged, sheltered, and patched up limitlessly by a great number of people, to whom I owe my deep and inexpressible gratitude. Above all, I owe them the acknowledgement that PhD research is a collective endeavour. The final product is the result of the joint effort of many a people, to whom this work is dedicated.

Neither this thesis nor I would (still) be here if it was not for Nora Flett, Isabella Aufschnaiter, Norma Kirchler, Claudia Morgavi, Elfi Hain, Paula Buchberger, and Tom Barker. This work is thus dedicated to my beloved Granny Nora – for always providing me with shelter, comfort, love, and a listening ear in times of crisis as well as creativity; to my sister Isabella, for being the best sister in the world, and her partner Thomas Gebetsroither; to my best friend Norma, whose resourcefulness and resilience, in the face of whatever life has thrown in our respective paths so far, has been an indispensable source of inspiration and succour over the years; to my friend Claudia in Durham – for the warmth of her friendship and the generosity of her support; to Elfi and Schorsch – for always coming to my rescue and never failing to cheer me up with your infectious energy; to Paula Buchberger and her partner Hans – for all their support and for providing me with a new home in Munich after the PhD; and to Tom Barker, for coming into my life at just the right moment, when I needed you most.

I dedicate this work to my parents who left us much too soon: to my mother Valerie Aufschnaiter – for equipping me with a deep-seated social conscience and a fighter spirit, to always try and go against the mainstream – it is this early activist socialisation that I am now very grateful for; to my father Alois Aufschnaiter – I could not have wished for a better guardian angel during all these years; to my uncle and his family: Richard, Cristina, Olivia, Lucine, and Michael Flett; to my aunt and her family: Diana, Peter, Robert, and Sofia Karpinski; to my aunts and their partners: Leni Aufschnaiter, Anni and Adi Soder; and to my "favourite" cousin Alfred Soder, and Ingrid and Lena, for their interest in my research, their unrelenting moral guidance, material support, and for always providing me with a home from home.

To my friends: Yong Ooi Lin (Carol Yong) and Andreas Burghofer, Jyoti Mehta and her family, Jürgen Wagner (thank you for everything, seahorse; not being able to complete our

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Last but not least, in the financial realm, I thank Durham University for awarding me the Durham Doctoral Fellowship, the University of Vienna for previous research grants, and the Austrian federal government and tax payers, for their generous support during my long years of study in the form of the Studienbeihilfe and Auslandsstudienbeihilfe. It goes without saying that it was this financial security net that enabled me to dedicate my energy full-time to research.

Lastly, I owe my thanks to all those who never failed to respond to requests of mine and everyone else who has helped me in a myriad different ways. Above all, my thanks also go to all the researchers and authors whose works I have had the privilege of reading during this PhD. The "References and sources of inspiration" reveal my intellectual debts. Finally, I thank the unknown future reader for taking the time to read this story.

Thank you for affording me the opportunity of embarking on this journey of self-discovery. It is thanks to all of you that I am who I am today.

"*Another world is not only possible, she's on her way. Maybe many of us will not be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing.*"
Arundhati Roy, "Come September". In: the algebra of infinite justice (Roy 2002: 299)

Photo: Claudia C. Aufschnaiter

Appendix 1 – List of stories

This is an (incomplete) list of the most important stories I collected during the research (on file with the author) and analysed in this thesis according to their types:

- TRIBAL STORIES: originally oral tribal stories from the four different tribes that were recorded by the activists and are being used in their materials;
- ADIVASI VIEWS: stories of statements made by Adivasis and about their lives retold by the activists, which are intended to represent the former's particularly Adivasi worldview and values;
- EVENTS: retellings of events by the activists;
- Stories in OFFICIAL NGO REPORTS and PUBLICATIONS; and
- REFLECTIONS: by the activists on blogs and privately recorded.

I then classified these different types of stories according to (a selected number of) values represented in them, and (a selected number of) purposes they serve. The values are community (unity), sharing, environmental stewardship, intergenerational learning, honesty, kindness, non-acquisitiveness, and traditionalism. The purposes are mobilisation, instruction, elicitation of empathy, forging connections, and fundraising.

TRIBAL STORIES

T1 Kattunayakan song, "Banni Baba Nange"
T2 Anita and Lalita cultural documentation: Bettakurumbas
T3 Anita and Lalita cultural documentation: Kattunayakans
T4 Anita and Lalita cultural documentation: Mullukurumbas
T5 Anita and Lalita cultural documentation: Paniyas
T6 AMS Adivasi Cultural Documentation Centre, The Story of Karadi Bomman, written by Vishnu Wardhan, 10 years old, Bettakurumba tribe
T7 The Peechi-Keni Folklore
T8 Kattunayakan brother-sister-gourd origin story
T9 Our house and the anthill (Chembakolli pack)
T10 Three friends (Kilina Penga – short stories and songs of the Paniya tribe)

ADIVASI VIEWS

A1 Rashmi Varma, Beyond the Politics of Representation: Tracing the Adivasi in Postcolonial Literary Studies; on Upamanyu Chatterjee's "English, August. An Indian Story"
A2 G.N. Devy, in "A Nomad Called Thief", "A Vision for Development according to the first batch of students of the postgraduate Tribal Studies diploma programme at the Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh"
A3 Helen Cromar, Adivasi book
A4 Mari Thekaekara, Why the Bettakurumbas hate the Paniyas
A5 AMS/ACCORD, How to make a Volunteer out of an Adivasi Youth?
A6 AMS/ACCORD, Adivasi Food Book 2013
A7 AMS Adivasi Cultural Documentation Centre, The animals in Jungle Book, written by Arun Kumar, 10 years old, Kattunayakan tribe
A8 AMS, Sangam Stories, Chomara's youth gift a house to Karunakaran!
A9 Mari Thekaekara, "An old man's query - why the written word?"
A10 Chathi (Paniya) land dispossession story
A11 Story about forest from Thambi (Mullukurumba)
A12 Story of Chathi's mobilisation
A13 Mari Thekaekara, 23 May, Kallichal, 11 am
A14 Mari Thekaekara, Chathi Chetan story
A15 Kesavan and Thambi food story
A16 Bettakurumba Vellan and Veeran hunting story
A17 Mari Thekaekara, Manben-leader of Bettakurumba of Theppakadu hamlet story

A18 Mari Thekaekara, Chathi mobilisation story
A19 Parable of the labourers, as told by Stan
A20 Mari Thekaekara, Inside tribal India
A21 Mari Thekaekara, And the people of Chembakolly have their land
A22 Mari Thekaekara, Story of Yellamalai dispossession
A23 Marigan talks about sustainability (2008), Chembakolli pack
A24 Surendiren talks about education (2008), Chembakolli pack
A25 KTS talks about the tea trade (2008), Chembakolli pack
A26 Chathi talks about land rights (2008), Chembakolli pack
A27 The Chembakolli story, Chembakolli pack

EVENTS

E1 The different versions of the land occupation/1988 demonstration AMS/ACCORD founding story (Stan's different versions: DftI, at the occasion of Mallika Sarabhai's visit; Chathi's reenactment of the animator mobilisation during the theatre training for the school kids in Vidyodaya to reconnect them with their history, as part of the incipient Culture Centre)
E2 Mari Thekaekara, Discrimination of Paniya woman on bus 1984
E3 Stan Thekaekara, Kundakeyni Kaavu Festival, Ayyankolli, 7th May 2010
E4 Story of Deva and Roopa's farewell and how Bomman had stopped the rain that day

OFFICIAL REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

O1 AMS, 2007 letter "Relocation of the 38 Kattunayakan families from the Benne area of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve"
O2 ACCORD proposal
O3 ACCORD, Towards a strategy for self-reliance
O4 AMS/ACCORD, Focus areas for animators for next year
O5 Rethinking Chembakolly
O6 ACCORD history updated: towards self reliance. The story of ACCORD and its involvement with the Tribal Communities of Gudalur, Tamilnadu, South India
O7 Accord in India: A tea plantation for the Adivasis
O8 Tribal development and "ACCORD", Planters' Chronicle, April 1997

REFLECTIONS

R1 The Shola Trust, "The Elephants in Thorapally"
R2 Adivasi Tee Projekt, "The double eye"
R3 At the Edge of Existence, Indigenous Cultures and Conservation, "A Bitter-Sweet Story of Honey"
R4 At the Edge of Existence, Indigenous Cultures and Conservation, "Puteri – celebrating the harvest"
R5 At the Edge of Existence, Indigenous Cultures and Conservation, "The Sacred grove in Verkadavu"
R6 At the Edge of Existence, Indigenous Cultures and Conservation, "Home is where the forest is…"
R7 At the Edge of Existence, Indigenous Cultures and Conservation, "Living with Elephants. Stories of Faith"
R8 At the Edge of Existence, Indigenous Cultures and Conservation, "Inside Kaavus"
R9 Tarsh Thekaekara, "Adivasis, hunting and the Forest Rights Act"
R10 Tarsh Thekaekara, "An Elephant in my garden"
R11 Tarsh Thekaekara, "Bees and Bettakurumbas"
R12 Tarsh Thekaekara, "Fire on the mountain, run, run, run!"
R13 Tarsh Thekaekara, "Human elephant (no) conflict"
R14 Tarsh Thekaekara, "Karunakaran and his bear story"
R15 Tarsh Thekaekara, "Once upon a time"
R16 Tarsh Thekaekara, "The fishing forest watcher"

R17 Tarsh Thekaekara, “The tiger, temple, and moving out from Benne”
R18 Tarsh Thekaekara, “To hunt or not to hunt”
R19 Mari Thekaekara, “Lessons of the past for young Adivasi”
R20 Mari Thekaekara, “A bit of healthy non-competition”
R21 Mari Thekaekara, “A few questions to begin with”
R22 Mari Thekaekara, “Adivasi people - proud not primitive”
R23 Mari Thekaekara, “Adivasis and alcohol”
R24 Mari Thekaekara, “Away from the rat race”
R25 Mari Thekaekara, “Sustainable living”
R26 Mari Thekaekara, “Garden party with the forest people”
R27 Mari Thekaekara, “India has reneged on all its promises to Adivasis”
R28 Mari Thekaekara, “Disquiet in Gudalur valley”
R29 Mari Thekaekara, “Inside India’s forest communities”
R30 Mari Thekaekara, “Jharkhand – an Adivasi extravaganza”
R31 Mari Thekaekara, “Making a difference in Mudumalai”
R32 Mari Thekaekara, “A struggle for justice”, Resurgence
R33 Mari Thekaekara, “The end of the rainbow”
R34 Mari Thekaekara, “Honey is life”
R35 Mari Thekaekara, “A symbiotic bond”
R36 Mari Thekaekara, “Wisely poor”
R37 Mari Thekaekara, “When Adivasis meet Al Gore…”
R38 Mari Thekaekara, “Calvin Klein and the tea pickers”
R39 Mari Thekaekara, “Dream scheme”
R40 Mari Thekaekara, “Tribal Women: Trauma of Transition”
R41 Mari Thekaekara, “Starting a campaign, wish us luck”
R42 Mari Thekaekara, “Sweat and sorrow: Mari Marcel Thekaekara appeals for help to protect the threatened livelihoods of tribal peoples of southern India”
R43 Mari Thekaekara, “Who will bell the big cat?”
R44 Mari Thekaekara, “The peripheral Indians”
R45 Mari Thekaekara, “Turning the tide”
R46 Mari Thekaekara, “Undermining tribal culture”
R47 Mari Thekaekara, “Vedanta undermined!”
R48 Mari Thekaekara, “When insensitivity is the norm”
R49 Mari Thekaekara, “The Moolukurumbas – Loosing their Lifestyle”
R50 Mari Thekaekara, “A traditional Paniya wedding”
R51 Mari Thekaekara, “Moolukurumbas of India”
R52 Mari Thekaekara, “Kattunayakan of India”
R53 Mari Thekaekara, “Paniyas of India”
R54 Mari Thekaekara, “Meeting with Paniya’s [sic] of Kerala at NWTWS”
R55 Mari Thekaekara, “Detribalisation of Adivasis in the Nilgiris”
R56 Mari Thekaekara, “Chorian’s stand”
R57 Mari Thekaekara, “Where has all the conscience gone?”
R58 Mari Thekaekara, “Against hooch”
R59 Mari and Stan Thekaekara, Various versions of the ACCORD history
R60 Mari Thekaekara, “The cry for a collector”
R61 Mari Thekaekara, “A collector for the people”
R62 Mari Thekaekara, “A dream in Gudalur”
R63 Mari Thekaekara, “Of butterflies, birds and bees (and several million Adivasis). An inside view of the tribals vs environmentalists debate”
R64 Mari Thekaekara, “Learning from the wisdom of sages”
R65 Mari Thekaekara, “The time trap”
R66 Mari Thekaekara, “People and other pests”
R67 Mari Thekaekara, “Your god, the written word”
R68 Mari Thekaekara, “To save the Nilgiris”
R69 Mari Thekaekara, “The tribal battle”

R70 Stan Thekaekara, “Does Matson matter?”
R71 Stan Thekaekara, “People first – justice in a global economy”
R72 Stan Thekaekara, “Globalisation – who benefits?”
R73 Stan Thekaekara, “Just Change – humanising globalisation”

Appendix 2 – List of recorded interactions

AUDIORECORDINGS OF OFFICIAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

1	Date:	16/07/2009
	Place:	Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Office, Apt. 5, Shree Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411 004
	Interviewee:	Neema Pathak, Arshiya Bhose
	Comments:	Neema to send me topo sheets of Tamil Nadu
	Extra questions asked and topics discussed:	Biharti -> individual rights (?) NGOs – community Environmental FD
2	Date:	26/08/2009
	Place:	Thalavadi, Divine School
	Interviewee:	S.M.A. Viennie
	Comments:	Went through resolutions in Tamil from Adivasi rally with Viennie
3	Date:	18/09/2009
	Place:	Department of Sociology, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry
	Interviewee:	Prof. B.B. Mohanty
	Comments:	Not really the right person to interview on Forest Rights Act; however, he gave me an article of his on farmer suicides in Maharashtra and invited me to the Social Mobility in South India Conference on 24/25 Sept.
4	Date:	30/06/2010
	Place:	Vienna
	Interviewee:	Roy David of CORD/NAA

AUDIORECORDINGS OF INFORMAL INTERACTIONS AND PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

INDIA

19/07-14/08/2009	Development from the Inside course
09/08/2009	South Indian Adivasi Network (SIAN) and TAF Adivasi Rally Coimbatore on World Indigenous Peoples Day
13/09/2009	TAF meeting in Trichy
24-25/09/2009	Social Mobility conference in Pondicherry
23/03/2010	Culture Project meeting, Gudalur
09/04/2010	Chathi AMS play at Vidyodaya morning assembly
10-11/04/2010	Priya and company, Theppakadu
20/04/2010	Tribal songs of Vidyodaya children
02/05/2010	Dinner at 27 Mile, Gudalur
02/05/2010	Meeting with Oriana Reid-Collins
10/05/2010	AMS/ACCORD Education Team meeting, Gudalur
13/05/2010	Conservation education sharing, Keystone, Kotagiri
20/05/2010	Lunch with Mari, Gudalur
24-30/05/2010	Visit to Vienne (TAF coordinator) and family, Thalavadi
31/05/2010	Chai for change brainstorming, Gudalur
01/06/2010	27 Mile lunch, Gudalur
05-11/06/2010	Last days in Gudalur

UK

21/02/2010	Just Change Directors meeting, Marsh Farm, Luton
26/02/2011	International Development Conference, Newcastle

04-07/04/2011	Enterprise School, Durham
28/04/2011	Mari's visit to London
21/05/2011	Just Change national meeting, Oxford
11/07/2011	Communities in Crisis AHRC workshop, Leeds
29/02/2012	Rashmi Varma Adivasi in Postcolonial Literature seminar, Durham
26-27/03/2012	Writing Across Boundaries workshop, Durham
02/05/2012	Fairtrade Forum, Durham
10/06/2012	Just Change Directors Away Day, ActionAid, London
12/07/2013	Just Change Directors Meeting, Oxford

GERMANY

25/06/2010	Suman, Roy David on their visit to Tutzing

VIDEO RECORDINGS

INDIA

19/07-15/08/09	Development from the Inside course
09/08/2009	South Indian Adivasi Network (SIAN) and TAF Adivasi Rally Coimbatore on World Indigenous Peoples Day
21/12/2009	Vidyodaya girls drumming
22/10/2009	Vidyodaya school assembly
23/10/2009	Vidyodaya tribal songs
13/11/2009	Gudalur Adivasi Hospital mobile clinic
14/11/2009	Vidyodaya Children's Day
05/12/2009	Adivasi Day Kaanjikolly
06/12/2009	Theppakadu, Priya and company
15/12/2009	Tribal teacher trainees film screening of Honey Hunters of the Blue Mountains
21/03/2010	Darpana performance in Chembakolli
10/04/2010	Visit to Priya and company, Theppakadu

Appendix 3 – Significant fieldwork events and research trajectory 2009-12

23/7/2009
DftI Tarsh tribals vs tigers debate
30/7/2009
How I got placement with Mari
12-13/9/2009
TAF meeting Trichy
28/10/2009
Meeting with Petra Bursee
Rishi Valley projects
29/10/2009
How the possible collaboration with potential research assistant, Sonia, grad student of Thanuja's, did not work out
30/10/2009
Lunch with KTS & Petra in town: hot to get people to move to the Madhuvana estate in Devala; whether to have solar energy or hydropower there; Give a Hand project
5/11/2009
Dinner at Ram & Rama's: discuss intercultural visits and problem of too much focus/attention on Chembakolli
6/11/2009
Sorting of the remainder of the ACCORD library books with Mari and Stan when they come down from 27 Mile, their home; Stan always has the last word on everything
8/11/2009
Facebook conversation with Durham anthropology PhD colleague Beki about fieldwork crises – real eye-opener; consult Durham Anthropology Field Blog
24/11/2009
Survival book arrives (this is how I connected with people in Gudalur – via books!) simultaneously with one of Stan's visits; discussion about decrease in insurance payments (why?)
25/11/2009
Durga on how she will remember me: with tea in flask & laptop
26/11/2009
Institutionalisation of ACCORD discussion with Durga
5/12/2009
Adivasi celebrations
6/12/2009
Outing with Priya, Thamarai etc.
15/12/2009
Viewing of the Keystone film "Honey Hunters of the Blue Mountains" with the teacher trainees at the hospital
20/12/2009
Dinner at 27 Mile with the entire Thekaekara family: talk about Oxford, Daniel Taghioff, FRA implementation, and the future of pro-people conservation
21/3/2010
Landmark day of Darpana performance; discuss esp. Stan's observations on intertribal boundaries in the car back from performance
23/3/2010
Another amazing day: impromptu meeting on culture project with Stan/Mari, Ram/Rama, Surendiren; talk with Liz about ActionAid; go through Lebenszeichen calendars on IP worldwide with teacher trainees
27/3/2010

Electrical accident incident at school: current passes through my body when connecting laptop cable; find myself unable to let go for a what seems an agonizingly long time; Surendiren rings up company mentioning "foreigner"
3/4/2010
Write to TUDI; Paniya funeral in Kottarvayal
4/4/2010
Easter eulogy by Stan on the peskiness of researchers at Easter celebration at 27 Mile when researcher rings Thekaekara home that day
7/4/2010
Durga talks about starting video diaries project ourselves, instead of waiting for everyone else; like everything else it never takes off; go through Chembakolli pack with kids
8/4/2010
Asked to do a song writing lesson with 8th standard kids ("asking parents why they are not teaching them their traditional knowledge")
9/4/2010
Chathi cultural instruction day again; stages interesting impro play with teacher trainees and kids about 1980s AMS mobilisation
10-11/4/2010
Amazing day with Priya & Co in Theppakadu; sleepover at theirs
11/4/2010
Dinner at 27 Mile; Anita & Luke (economist) on visit; AMS-owned factory issue raised by Luke; Nagapattinam fishing community participative capital concept discussed; but also distillation of essential oils such as rosemary and import of wines from Mari's sister Betty's husband's vineyard in Italy
13/4/2010
Write up GN Devy's vision for development; Tamil lessons with Srinivasan
14/4/2010
Tarsh requests FRA literature; research Birsa Munda; Vishu at Ram & Rama's; Surendiren fashions bow and arrow, and explains the culinary value of different birds; Ramdas gives me books on Native Americans and Aborigines; discussion with him about native cultures
Hedgehog in Germany story involving Surendiren and Gangadaran – Ramdas: "those Mullukurumbas, all they think about is food"
15/4/2010
Start writing proposal "How could the Culture Centre be?"
Diary entry: at very elaborate Vishu lunch at Shyla/NK's, Shyla mentions Paniya pics & Mysore photographer (Anil Warrior); "I am so cross, why does not she tell Mari? What is wrong with these people?" – breakdown of communication between different members of the organisation
Vehicles blasting music & political messages at top volume around Gudalur town all day
18/4/2010
Talk with Liz about ActionAid & how her job profile is very different from what she expected/was told it would be
19/4/2010
Ask Surendiren for picture with teacher trainees; he turns it into impromptu lesson on IP
20/4/2010
Watch Chathi and two other koratti nadagam masters perform at Vidyodaya
23/4/2010
Talk to Liz again about disparities in her role and what she is doing; develop even more doubts regarding further involvement; talk to Ramdas - change my mind
24/4/2010
Go through Bettakurumba file with Priya (Keti); she identifies a few mistakes (e.g. women's saris were not white); "I absolutely foreground factual accuracy, but in my research I am more interested in how knowledge is produced and mediated, and less in establishing an absolute truth."
Spend day fishing at Upper Kargudi with Priya et al.
27/4/2010
Start working with Helen, a new volunteer; up to Mari; interesting lecture about Fair Trade by Stan

6/5/2010
Amazing conversation with Shikha about JC: the crossroads they are at (expansion), the other groups who are struggling
8/5/2010
First meeting with Oriana; she's working with Arun (ex-Vidyodaya, half Kattunayakan, half Keralan Kurichian); Oriana: "Interesting how they're doubling up as research assistants thanks to ACCORD & their English instruction"
12/5/2010
Enlightening discussion with Mari about Ajit Menon, C.R. Bijoy, Tarsh, and NGOs
13/5/2010
To Ooty with Mahesh for Keystone workshop; interesting discussion there with Anita about culture project
21-22/5/2010
Interesting discussions with Mahesh about FRA; organic certification – not for tea because of the need for a factory
25/5/2010
Visit to Thalavadi; interesting comment of Viennie's on ACCORD & Roy David's wine cellar (Roy David had come to give training on FRA last month); supposedly a comment on the different lifestyle choices of NGO leaders?
29/5/10
Visit to Myrada agro NGO
31/5/10
Stan comes round in the afternoon to talk Chai for change idea through with me and Helen (idea first, then money; first trust, then company; "social enterprise")
Talk with Liz about new school bus regulations (which is why they have to use jeeps now); parents have demanded that Chembakolli money be used for this (for what?), but money does not go directly to Chembakolli (no surprises there)
1/6/10
Lunch at 27 Mile with Henry Tiphagne (of People's Watch) & wife Cynthia; really revealing conversation with Mari about Ravi, former animator
5/6/10
Durga asks me to take care of and show around the new UK medical elective students
10/6/10
Dilip tutors Suresh about conception of wealth; meet Gail Coelho at S/NK farewell party
25/6/10
Tutzing: book "Sustainable Futures"; Roy David's Adivasi posters; according to Roy, Tarsh got his ideas from CORD when he went there
29/6/10
Fantastic interview with Roy David (CORD) in Hotel Haydn Vienna
From 2/8/10
Linking my health to that of the planet, more holistic approach to PhD; is a PhD allowed to have a message? Fitting AMS fieldwork into larger debate about IP/climate change/justice; what have I learned from them? Bridging survival and advocacy
11/8/10
First mail from Mari in ages – still feeling torn – should I return to Gudalur or continue with PhD in Durham?
5/11/10
Develop idea that cultural change has been too swift in Gudalur over the past 30 years; "development" ambivalent; does not necessarily entail better standard of living
26/12/10
Read "Transition Handbook"; explore concept of resilience; see my thinking evolve from individual survivalism to community resilience/self-reliance - why community is so important
13/1/11
Discover entire history of AMS on Chembakolli blog
17/1/11

Discover Galtung's theories of self-reliance
19/1/11
Call from Mari - Manoharan has resigned because of family accident
25/1/11
Phillip Nathan's contention at Durham course Common Language Errors that we should only write for academic audiences (do not agree with him)
26/1/11
Follow up on Tarsh/Taghioff/Menon debate
4/2/11
Call from Mari (discuss Hasha, theatre, anti-alcohol campaign)
17/2/11
Get email from Mari saying they have new volunteer working with Shikha on culture project
7-8/4/11
Enterprise School; develop Chai for change idea; Manoharan registers chaiforchange.com for me
11/4/11
Email from Mari, talk with her later; rather depressing news from Gudalur (Manoharan); continue sorting AMS docs; discover loads of interesting stuff again; download and read Stan's academic article on Matson; go through Chief Seattle's speech again for Mari
25/4/11
First meeting with Mari in London since return from India in 2010; meal at Lucy Horitz's with Mari, Lucy, Mark, and Angela; give Mari book on Chief Seattle
26/4/11
To SOAS for Jharkhand Disappearing World exhibition
28/4/11
Meeting with Mari and Louise Ely at Arnos Grove at Mari's relative Pam
30/4/11
Watch "Ten Canoes" and send DVD to Gudalur; over the next few days read "The Songlines", "I heard the owl call my name" and "The forest people"
21/5/11
National JC meeting:
Tricia, Nikki, Helen, Liz, Jess, Graham, Lucy, Lara, Lucy, Chris, Dave, Lou, Sabita, John, Audrey, Martin; make JC Durham poster with watercolours; start off with poster presentation session; talk about community cafes; lunch break with directors; split into two groups to discuss action plans
30/5/11
Attend Transition Durham Reeconomy meeting at Alington House to introduce JC Durham, the Durham Food Coop and Food Cycle (with Wilf, Tom, Fiona, Julia, Steve, Neill)
2/6/11
Durham Social Enterprise lunch with Suzanne Auty: discuss how to develop social enterprise at Durham Uni; gives me advice on how to write business plan and pitch for Chai for change
11/6/11
Give JC presentation at Ustinov Seminar
19/6/11
Do JC stall at Neville's Cross Eco-Community Festival
22/6/11
Read Bakshi; JC directors' meeting, go to Oxford by bike
7/10/11
Terrific JC directors' meeting in Oxford; get to know Eva, Jackie and Glen from Marsh Farm; really heartening to have more ideological backup; overall very balanced meeting; discuss pricing; Lucy off to India; MF tell us about their OW (Operational Workshop); Tricia not happy with them because tea selling planned only from summer 2012; get spice boxes from Tricia who takes me to the station
24/10/11
Advise Survival International campaign manager Utsa Hazarika on tribal/Adivasi/indigenous issues in India for planned anti-prejudice against Adivasis in India campaign
25/10/11

Finally call Mari: intensive hour-long conversation; she's really down; a lot of bad luck; Shikha/Subhash/Dilip affair
23/11/11
Presentation of Adivasi Germany paper at Durham Anthropology writing up seminar; discover Art & Activism in contemporary Dalit & Adivasi movements conference in Delhi
2/12/11
Interesting conversation with Ben Sellers about trade unions and JC at People's Bookshop
8/12/11
Research South Asianists; Utsa Hazarika from Survival International rings; really good conversation; starts an avalanche of further research; compile materials for her
9-10/12/11
Listen to Alpa Shah's Red Belt BBC Radio 4 programme
12/12/11
ATP advent calendar
15/12/11
Discuss use of stories as analytic device with Ben; says tea is best he has ever tasted; sell him a packet
14/2/12
Read GIFT JC participative capital note; discover Graeber's value theory; read Baviskar's review of Shah
15/2/12
Very taken with Paloma Gay y Blasco & her seminar at Durham; fascinating talk about friendship, anthropology, and gypsies; feels like a breath of fresh air – the kind of anthropology I want to do
18/2/12
Email from Mari that Manoharan is dying
23/2/12
Get email from Priya, Mari's culture project assistant in Gudalur, asking whether I had collected artefacts during my stay and whether I knew where they were – irony! Reply that we did not have opportunity to collect artefacts back then
29/2/12
Amazing presentation by Rashmi Varma at English department on Adivasi representation in postcolonial literature
26-27/3/12
Writing across boundaries workshop
10/6/12
JC away day at ActionAid Offices, London; discover Shikha's blog
26/9/12
Start sorting stories into categories
5/10/12
In touch with Mari again
18/10/12
Tim Smit talk at Durham

Appendix 4 – Questions to be addressed before fieldwork and in the field

Who are the gatekeepers/relevant stakeholders?
What is it I am doing and what exactly am I looking for? What is my purpose, have I grasped it fully, and have I clearly explained my purpose to everyone involved?
Who owns or may think they own what I am looking for?
What will I do with my findings/results?
Do my research participants know what I will do with the findings/results?
What is my institutional affiliation? What is my own positionality?
Where are inherent academic/social/political/cultural pitfalls in the field?
Where may ethnocentrism/cultural baggage influence my findings/results?
Where may gender issues influence my findings/results?
Where may language and interpretation dilemmas influence the validity, truth and reliability of the information gathered?
Have I gathered enough information beforehand in order to ask the right questions in the field?

Have I received permission to conduct my research at all levels, from the national to the local?
Have I made use of all the available communication channels?
Have I gone through all the necessary formalities?
Am I adhering to the local customs? Am I making the local culture work toward my research goals?
Am I fulfilling research participants' expectations?
Have I disclosed enough about myself, personally and professionally, e.g. in order to overcome power imbalances?
Who do I need to approach first, in which order and how?
Am I building enough rapport and trust by listening and showing respect, empathy, and honesty? Am I paying enough attention to informal and off-the-record data?
Am I able I explain clearly what I am doing and what I need from others?
Am I taking opportunities to speak publicly about my work (talks, seminars, meetings, etc.)?
Have I considered people's time constraints?

Have I taken the appropriate equipment, transport, clothing? Am I dressing appropriately?
Have I come at the wrong/right time of the year?
Do I have a plan B for every fieldwork site?
Have I formulated milestones and am I working towards their completion at a certain date?
Have I hired the right research assistants, have I paid them adequately (according to local rates), have I considered their positionality, have I met the research community's expectations?
Have I linked up to fellow (senior, PhD, etc.) researchers in my field?
Am I getting carried away from the academic environment and critical/reflective thinking?
Am I becoming biased/partial?
Am I in regular contact with my supervisor(s)?
Do I need to refocus and/or refine/reformulate research questions?
Have I created sufficient back-ups of interview data and copies of field notes?
Have I budgeted enough money, esp. for emergencies?

What are my long-term goals, what will I do with the information gathered after my PhD?
What are my exit strategies? Have I allowed enough time for it?
Have I honoured all my obligations? Have I worked out how to stay in touch?
Have I established ways to share my work/insights? Have I negotiated the ownership of the data gathered? Have I considered issues of confidentiality? Have I set/clarified the limits of the research to the participants?
Am I showing enough appreciation and gratitude? Have I provided the research participants with proper feedback?

Appendix 5 – Questions that arose during fieldwork with AMS/ACCORD

INDIGENISATION

Conscientisation, indigenisation, unification through education (museum, school, cultural festival, demonstrations, etc.)?

How are Adivasis being encouraged to use their indigenous identity as a tool for asserting their land rights? How is indigeneity instrumentalised for mobilising Adivasis?

Are their identities being transformed in the process, by connecting them to the wider global indigenous peoples discourse?

Which are the externally introduced elements and which ones are in fact inherent to their culture?

> External: Rights-based approach, mitigation of threats to indigenous (Adivasi) identity/strengthening of Adivasi and sub-tribal group identity?
>
> Internal: Intrinsic, holistic, kinship-like attachment to their environment(s)?

Do they see a danger of the freezing of their indigenous identity?

How do Development interventions, however well-meaning they may be, change indigenous identities?

Indigenisation to save the planet – creating a world indigenous culture – using indigenous identity as a weapon against the onslaught of a dominant mass culture?

FLUIDITY/CULTURE CHANGE

How can the fluid, ever-changing, non-codificatory, and dynamic character of Adivasi indigenous identity be taken account of and subsequently adequately represented? How do we make sure their identity is not frozen at a particular point in time, a danger any attempts at preserving/documenting/capturing cultures, such as in museums, are susceptible to? How do we take account of acculturation and religious and cultural syncretism?

INDIGENOUS IDENTITY AS CULTURAL CAPITAL

How can they source/draw strength from their indigenous culture(s)?

How are they trying to strengthen Adivasi cultural identities?

How are Adivasis themselves getting involved in the project?

Do they approve of me writing about them and other tribes in India?

I sensed that they have some deep concerns about what I am hoping to do over the course of the next year, especially in relation to positionality, ownership, modes of participation of the research participants, decision-making about the research, and research politics. I agree with them that those researched should be involved right from the beginning – from the proposal drafting to the final submission and publication stages; and not merely in a participatory or collaborative, but a collegiate way; ideally all those involved in the study should be co-authors. Pre-existing power-imbalances, however, make it difficult for both sides to overcome this problem, and find innovative and mutually beneficial solutions to it.

STUDYING MOVEMENTS

How are Adivasis achieving social change?

Studying an idea vs. studying a community – this time (2009/10 as opposed to 2003 and 2007) I am studying movements – what are the differences?

Research interest of Stan's: When do movements become institutionalised, when do they lose their revolutionary momentum?

I am interested in studying TAF because Adivasis themselves are supposed to be in charge of it? Are they?

Why is the flow of people from the West/Global North (in absence of a less problematic concept) to the East/Global South to "do good" so disproportionately distributed? In relation to anthropology – why are not more "non-Western" people studying Western societies? This is exactly what I want to

question – which economic/social/cultural factors are preventing people from the global south going to the global north to study the "other"/the exotic?
What are the differences and similarities between the five different tribes, Kattunayakan, Mullukurumba, Bettakurumba, Paniyar, Irular, in terms of access to land, land alienation and resistance to it, education, health?

COMMUNITY
How is the sense of community keeping them motivated?
Ask on community cohesiveness/capacity building as a resistance strategy. How do they build a community, how do they foster unity, especially across communal divisions? Do they unite people on the basis of their shared needs and problems, or in the face of a conflict adversely affecting a large number of different people?
How do Adivasis balance the gap between capitalism and socialism? Because both have their merits, but we need to find the balance. Have some Adivasi communities found this balance?
Talk about infrapolitics, hidden transcripts, subversive tactics, counter-hegemonic strategies, how they try to undermine the system. How do they make organisations, and the way they function, work towards their own benefit (story of presuming that they would treat his delivering sister badly if he did not withdraw the case).

SELF-RELIANCE
Another strategy, ownership: making their institutions their own (AMS at the centre, health, education, tea plantation – economic, marketing, banking and finance), ACCORD – resources and PR, Just Change.
Contradiction individual vs collective financial wealth in teaplanting – how can it be made community wealth?
Second land rights campaign – current TN government came to power on promise of distributing land to all the landless. How do they try to hold the government accountable?
Forest Rights Act – initially reluctant; Nilgiris now a model district; the aim is to involve all the NGOs. Which NGOs do they collaborate with, why with these and why not with others? Which ideological differences do they have with other organisations? Has it been a strategy or policy of theirs to stay detached from the power struggles raging between NGOs, political and other parties in the state, with Adivasis caught in the crossfire?
AMS was not part of protests against illegal notification of tiger reserve because preserving the tiger is in Adivasis' interest. But what if the Adivasis are displaced as a result of it?
How are they handing over the institutions to the Adivasis themselves?
How do they try to help tribals manage the shift towards dealing with outside society? But on whose terms? Adivasi or mainstream?
Do small-scale interventions really have an impact?
What is the role of the state?
Do they think AMS/ACCORD's example can be transferred to other places, and if yes, how?
What are the barriers for people to improve their lives? What are the hidden factors?
How and why do valid policies get diluted once they reach people? What goes wrong on the way? Why is there such a big discrepancy between the policy table and the mud hut?

FOREST RIGHTS ACT
What is their understanding of land titles? Discussion within second land rights campaign, esp. gender-aspect, men vs. women, community vs. individual? Are they going for individual titles or community rights first under the FRA?
Do they think the FRA is strengthening local self-governance institutions, such as the gram sabha, because they play a central role in the implementation of the FRA Act, i.e. the determination of land claims?
It would be gross over-romanticisation and a denial of ground actualities to expect the FRA to restore communal land ownership to Adivasi society – the question then is what are Adivasis hoping to gain from obtaining individual title deeds on what is left of their forest with the help of the act? It seems to me that their forest, as they sing and tell stories about it, is a paradise lost, and man incapable of

restoring what he has destroyed, so what is it they are hoping to gain through the act? In endorsing the act and proactively taking up the instruments built into the act, are they chasing a mirage of something long lost and unattainable in today's world or are they being realistic and adapting to changing times? Even though the latter situation is a better scenario than not having any control whatsoever over one's land, and even though the act provides for the safety net of non-transfer of land to non-tribals, how are they intending to deal with the conceptual change regarding the notion of forest that the act demands? Which effect is this going to have in the long run? Even though the act only seeks to vest Scheduled Tribes with titles to land occupied on or before 13 December 2005, and imposes a three-generational time requirement (75 years) on "other traditional forest dwellers", the question is who is going to be em- and disempowered by the act? Speaking of the Gudalur valley, is it going to change long-entrenched land relations, for instance between the Chettys and the tribal communities, or the Chettans and the latter, towards a more equitable distribution of land assets?

OUTSIDE/INSIDE and INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

How do they negotiate the shift from inside to outside? From forest subsistence economy to market economy? How do they attempt to ensure people have a valid say in the direction of their development? How do they manage the conflict between community vs. individual oriented cultures?

To which extent is the language of indigenous rights and other assertive language put into the mouths of Adivasis by NGOs and activists? Are Adivasis themselves taking up this human rights discourse and demanding their land under this umbrella term? Would the FRA have come into existence without the influence of rights-based NGOs? What is the Adivasis' own "genius" (Nehru)/stake in this development? A lot of funding for the fostering of rights-based movements was available over the past years that will run out again in a few years' time – where do they see the trend in the donor sector developing towards? On which issue will international aid divide people and nations next?

Do they have links to the Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples? What do they think of other tribal organisations?

MISCELLANEOUS

Which role does dreaming play in Paniya, Bettakurumba, Mullukurumba, Kattunayakan, and Irula societies?

Why has only Chembakolli been turned into a model village?

How did they select the teacher trainees?

Appendix 6 – Original research proposal

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Indigenism, Environmentalism, Ecogovernmentality, and the Law: Adivasi Engagements with Forest Rights Conflicts in South India

The most pressing issue faced by Adivasis, India's de facto indigenous peoples, today is their loss of control over their land and forest. The Adivasi land rights problem is a multi-faceted one and has to be attributed to a concurrence of numerous destructive processes undertaken in the name of national "development", such as the establishment of national parks in the interest of biodiversity conservation. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that the majority of Adivasis do not hold any documentation, and, consequently, legal titles proving their "ownership" of the lands they have lived on for longer than surrounding societies. The Adivasis' chief contention is that this system of "ownership" of land is alien to their own land conceptualisation and management because, as they ask, how can you (truly) "own" land? At the same time, the transnational indigenous land rights discourse with its connotation of environmental stewardship has had a profound resonance with Adivasi peoples in India. Channelled by the battle for the Forest Rights Act 2006, Adivasis with multifarious tribal affiliations are at present asserting their land and forest rights, and mobilising across communal, regional, and state divisions on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

Research Objective

This research project was born out of the need for a comprehensive analysis of the different dynamics that have a bearing on the emergence and management of Adivasi forest rights conflicts, especially in the light of 1) recent legal developments (most notably the Forest Rights Act 2006), 2) the growing influence of environmentalist, 3) indigenist, and 4) ecogovernmental discourses in India. It is my aim to examine the supposed correlations between these variables, and to explore how these variables are, on one level, attempting to manipulate Adivasi responses to land alienation, and, on another, how they are in actual fact influencing Adivasi resistance strategies against displacement from their ancestral land.

Research Questions

LAND/FOREST: How do Adivasis engage in and "negotiate" the land rights conflicts they find themselves embroiled in, specifically in the context of reserved forests and protected areas? Why should Adivasis be entitled to "special" land rights and how is this connected to the influence of the transnational rhetoric of indigeneity?
INDIGENEITY: How is this idea being appropriated by Adivasis as a political tool for reclaiming land and how is it translated into vernacular Adivasi idioms?
LAWS: Is the (implementation of the) Forest Rights Act 2006 reshaping how Adivasis go about reclaiming their land?
ENVIRONMENTALISM: How is the dichotomisation of Adivasis as "natural conservationists" and "eco-saints", on the one hand, and as "illegal encroachers", on the other, influencing the way they are articulating and legitimising their land claims?

Methodology

A mix of qualitative methods will be employed that will encompass: 1) participant observation; 2) a face-to-face questionnaire with open-ended questions for obtaining socio-economic household data and a village-level land survey; 3) informal, unstructured, semi-structured, and group interviews, 4) photography, film, and audio recording, and 5) geo-spatial land mapping using ArcGIS.

Thanking you for your assistance and interest in the research project.

Appendix 7 – Original research proposal Tamil

ஆராய்ச்சியின் திட்ட விரிவாக்கம்

சுதந்திர நாட்டின் சுற்று சூழலில் தென் இந்திய ஆதிவாசிகளின் வன உரிமை போராட்டம்

இந்தியாவில் இன்றைக்கு ஆதிவாசி மக்கள் தேசிய அளவில் எதிர் நோக்கி இருக்கும் பிரச்சனை, அவர்களின் நிலங்களின் மீதும் வனத்தின் மீதும் உள்ள கட்டுப்பாடு இழப்பு ஆகும். ஆதிவாசிகளின் நில உரிமை பிரச்சனை பண்முகப்பட்ட பிரச்சனைகளில் ஒன்று அதாவது தேசிய வளர்ச்சி திட்டம் என்கிற வடிவில் விவாதித்து ஒப்புதல் அளிக்கப்பட மேற்கொள்ளப்பட்டது.

அநேக அழிய கூடிய திட்டங்கள், அதாவது தேசிய பூங்காக்கள் என்கிற வகையில் ஏற்படுத்தி பாதுகாக்க பட்டவை., நீண்ட காலமாக வாழ்ந்து வரும் ஆதிவாசிகள், நிலத்திற்கு உண்டான எழுத்து பூர்வமான பத்திரமோ அல்லது பத்திரவாயிலான நிருபனமோ அல்லது சட்ட ரீதியான உரிமையோ எதுவும் பெரு வாரியான ஆதிவாசிகளிடம் இல்லாதுதான் அவர்களுடைய பிரச்சனையே. ஆதிவாசிகள் அனுபவிப்பது வந்த எல்லா சொத்துகள் எல்லாம் பூர்வீகமான சொத்துக்களாகும் , என்றாலும் அவர்களிடம் சட்ட ரீதியான உரிமம் எதுவும் இல்லாததால் , அவர்களுடைய நிலத்தை பூங்காக்களாக மாற்றுகின்றனர். இதனால், அவர்கள் எல்லாரும் பெரும் துண்பப்படுகிறார்கள்.

ஆதிவாசிகளின் பிரத்தியேக வாதம் என்னவென்றால் "அவர்கள் வைத்துள்ள நில உரிமை நிலங்களுடன், அவர்கள் பூர்வீகமாக அனுபவித்துவரும் நிலங்களையும் சேர்த்து அவர்கள் பெயரில் நிரவாகம் அவர்களிடமே எழுத்து பூர்வமான பட்டா வழங்க வேண்டும் என்பதே ஆகும்"

வனதுறை நிர்வாகம் "இந்த நிலங்கள் எப்படி வந்தன என்கிற ஆதாரம் கோருகின்றன". மறு பக்கம், அதே நேரத்தில் சுதேசி நில உரிமை பிரசங்கம் சுற்று சூழல் பராமரித்தல் அலுவளர்களுடைய பிரசாங்கமும் இந்தியாவில் உள்ள ஆதிவாசி மக்களிடையே எதிரொலிக்கின்றன. வன சட்டத்தையும் எதிர்த்து ஆதிவாசி மக்கள் போராடி வருகின்றனர்.

ஆராய்ச்சியின் நோக்கம்

இந்த ஆராய்ச்சி ஆரம்பமானது ஆதிவாசிகளின் வன உரிமை போராட்டங்களை விரிவாக தெளிவுபட பல முனையில் ஆராய்ந்து அறிதல், சமீபகால சிறந்த சட்ட உதவிகள் குறிப்பாக

1) 2006 வன சட்டத்தில் கண்ட விதி முறைகள்

2) சுற்று சூழல் ஆர்வர்களின் வளரும் செல்வாக்கும்

3) சுதேசி

இது சம்பந்தமாக என்னுடைய கருத்துக்களை (லட்சியத்தினை) பரஸ்பர சம்பந்தமாக பரிசீலித்து இவற்றில் உள்ள பாகு பாடுகளையும் மாறு பாடுகளையும் நல்ல தெளிவு பட ஆய்வு செய்து ஒரு மாதத்தில் திறமையாக கையாண்டு ஆதிவாசிகளின் பூர்வீக நிலங்களையும் அதனுடன் தலைமுறை தலைமுறையாக அனுபவித்து வரும் வன நிலங்களையும் அவர்களின் பெயரில் சொந்தமாக்கப்பட வேண்டும். பூர்வீகமாக உரிமையுடன் அனுபவித்து வரும் காட்டு நிலங்களில் இருந்து ஆதிவாசிகள் குடி பெயராமல் தடுக்கப்படவேண்டும்.

ஆராய்ச்சியின் கேள்விகள்

வன நிலம்

வனத்தில் உள்ள நிலங்களுக்கு எப்படி நில உரிமை போராட்டத்தில் ஆதிவாசிகள் ஈடுபட்டு போராடி வருகிறார்கள்.

பிரத்தியேகமாக வனத்தில் பாதுகாக்கப்பட்ட பகுதிகளில் அவர்கள் பூர்வீகமாக வசித்து அனுபவித்து வரும் நிலங்களுக்கு போராடி வருகிறார்கள்.

ஆதிவாசிகள் அந்நிலங்களின் பெயரில் உரிமை கொண்டாட சிறப்பு அந்தஸ்து கொடுக்கப்பட வேண்டும்.

இவைகள் ஆதிவாசிகளுக்கு அரசியல் கருவியாக உள்ளது. அவர்கள் பூர்வீகமாக அனுபவித்து வரும் காட்டு நிலங்களை சமன்படுத்தி அவர்கள் பெயரில் மாற்ற வழிவகை செய்தல் வேண்டும்.

சட்டம்

2006 வன சட்டத்தை மறு வடிவில் மாற்றி அமுல்படுத்தினால் அந்நிலங்களை (வைத்துள்ளவர்களை) அவர்கள் எவ்வாறு சமன் செய்து பன்பட்ட நிலங்களாக (விளை நிலங்களாக) மாற்றி வைத்து கொள்வார்கள்.

சுற்று சூழல்

ஆதிவாசிகள் ஒரு பக்கம் வனத்திற்கு பாதுகாவலர்களாக உள்ளார்கள். மறு பக்கம் அவர்கள் ஆக்கிரமித்துள்ள வன நிலங்களின் பெயரில் உரிமை கொண்டாடி போராடி வருகின்றனர். அவர்களின் உரிமையை நியாய படுத்துகிறார்கள்.

ஆராய்ச்சியின் வழிமுறைகள்

நல்ல தரமான ஆய்வு முறைகளை பின்வரும் வழி முறைகளின் படி மேற்கொள்ளுதல்,

1) ஆய்வில் கலந்து கொள்பவர்களின் கருத்து கேட்டல்

2) அவர்களின் சமூக, பொருளாதாரத்தை குறித்த நேருக்க நேர் கேள்விகளுக்கு உண்டான பதில்களை அறிதல் மற்றும் அவர்கள் கிராமங்களில் நில அளவை மெற்கொள்ளுதல்

3) சம்பிரதாயப்படி கூட்டம் கூடி நேர்காணுதல்,

4) புகைப்படங்கள், சினிமாக்கள் மற்றும் ஒளிநாடாக்கள் மூலமாகவும் தலபரப்பு, நில வரைபடங்கள் வாயிலாகவும் செய்தல் வேண்டும்

Appendix 8 – The double eye (Marcel Thekaekara 2001)

India's indigenous people reach Heidelberg.

They see	themselves	
	They see	Europe
		Germany
		Heidelberg
		the people
		Christiane
		Meike
		Ute
		Kai-Uwe
		many others
The Germans:	They see	Chathi
		Subramanian
		Stan
		Manikandan
		Radhakrishnany
		Gangadharan
		Ramdas
		Bomman
They see	indigenous people	
They see	Indians	
They see	India	
They see	Asia	

An Indian woman sees and experiences India's indigenous people and Germany's inhabitants. At the encounter her eyes start to flicker, her face starts to quiver. She sees double, triple, multiple. The diversity of people, of attitudes, of tolerances, of intolerances opens new thought horizons for her.

The expression for	
their	clash
the	coming together
the	assemblage of different ways of seeing and thinking is

The double eye (Marcel Thekaekara 2001: 5)

ACCORD: want to strengthen the Adivasi movement but the problem is that most people joining them are non-Adivasi; the conviction behind all their activities: Adivasi communities have to become and remain self-reliant; in the Adivasis' own words "They have to enable us to stand on our own feet."

What can Europeans and Indo-Europeans impart to Adivasis?

- A journey of a thousand kilometres begins with the first step.
- To achieve the possible means wanting the impossible.

What can Europeans and Indo-Europeans learn from the Adivasi?

- Time is more than hours and minutes.
- Not everything can be planned.
- Creativity develops out of chaos, from the enjoyment and love of life, the enjoyment and love of the new, the joy of talking and experiencing together. (Marcel Thekaekara 2001: 14)

The ACCORD support team's uneasiness at speaking "for" the Adivasis in Germany; that way they became mere interpreters; one of the rice group members' idea to invite Adivasis themselves to the German Protestant Church Day in Leipzig in 1997 as part of the ESG programme; many ifs and buts – culture shock, costs, etc.; the

Adivasis' decision to travel to Germany; sometimes it's easier to leave decisions to those concerned – they see less the problems and more the possibilities.
Brief characterisation of the Adivasi travel group; one of them described as a "picture postcard Adivasi: intelligent, compassionate, gentle and kind"

Arrival in Heidelberg

Welcome on a different planet!

- I am friendly, excited and curious about everything new.
- I abstain from forming expectations, prejudices, judgements.

If I manage to do that I will have turned into an Adivasi. (Marcel Thekaekara 2001: 25)

The challenge of passing airport security checks with bow and arrow; the flight and their first European meal are putheri (new rice), the Adivasi harvest festival symbolising the maturing of new rice at the start of a new season; Zürich's resemblance to Ooty; seeing some of the Adivasi men in trousers for the first time; surviving 140 km/h and driving on the "wrong" side on German motorways; "there hardly seem to be any people in Europe"; hearing the Adivasis communicate in English; the strangeness of eating dinner when it's still light (in Gudalur the sun sets abruptly at around 7 pm).

What can Adivasis do?

- They teach us to understand the term person (per-sona, someone who sounds)[17].
- They teach us that community (communio) and communication (communicatio) can work without mediation and translation.
- They make us cry when we say goodbye.

What can Germans do?

- They convey to Adivasis that hugging and kissing can be one of the most natural things in the world.
- Together with the Adivasis they experience that globalisation above all means a globalisation of the feeling to be supportive of each other.
- They experience that a peaceful goal, a peace-goal, coupled with the belief and trust in reaching this goal, can transform a dried out riverbed into a lively stream.

Christian symbology; some German impressions: the motivation behind inviting the Adivasis to Germany, "I considered it unfair that I was able to hop on a plane to India any time but the Adivasis not"; the visa process: countering everyday racism in India and threats from AMS/ACCORD critics, having to intervene at the highest levels in Germany and India; food worries: "Would we have to cook rice every day for four weeks?"; impressed with the Adivasis' tree climbing skills and their equanimity at giving a presentation in front of a 300-strong audience; "Through your work I learned that justice is possible – before that it was only ever mental acrobatics for me."; "There's a big difference between a holiday in India and Adivasis in your own garden."; "They were very quiet. I had the impression they lived in peace with each other."; "They weren't like foreigners."

What is success?

- If you do something at all.
- If you do more than is expected of you.
- If you do more than you expect of yourself.
- If you start something new together with others.
- If you command a friendly insistence or an insistent friendliness vis-à-vis potential donors.

[17] As related to Latin *personare* "to sound through" (e.g. as spoken through the mask of wood or clay worn by actors in later Roman theatre) (OED).

- If you're able to minimise financial demands to the extent of overcoming prospective donors resistance.
- If you can package these reduced demands in such an attractive way that donating ceases to be an extra effort of the will for the possible donor and instead becomes a friendly, even amicable transaction. (Marcel Thekaekara 2001: 34)

Storytellers don't enjoy high status in Western society in contrast to Adivasi society; ACCORD's philosophy: "Disadvantaged people need to rally at the local level in order to regain entry into the higher structures."; "people live very lonely and are becoming more self-focussed in industrialised countries"; visit to a German commune: concept of non-kin and mere friends living together at first strange for Adivasis but then observation that "there is no difference between the sangam (community; meaning the German commune) here and our sangam. They too are working to achieve self-determination. "; Adivasis impressed with the diverse economic activities the commune has developed for their long-term survival, their consensus decision-making principle and their communal fund; they later liken this communal fund to their forest and land; the commune catches the Adivasis' imagination – they realise that for them their communal way of life is a given; now see a need to preserve these Adivasi values in face of pressure from surrounding Indian society otherwise they'll end up having to rebuild their communities like the one in Germany.

What is important for Adivasis?

- To rejoice in the small
- To capture the moment
- Laughter as a means of communication
- Silence as a feeling of connectnedness
- Contemplating new things together
- To climb a balcony to get a better overview
- To take an extra umbrella in order to make someone else happy
- To never have to go into an old people's home, no matter how modern
- To be able to do without a mask

(Marcel Thekaekara 2001: 44)

Encouraging to see that people in Germany wanted to read about them; One World Shop: importance of selling an idea instead of merely a product, of obtaining products not necessarily of the highest quality but with a story and from cooperatives; easier to arouse interest with a concrete product though; products only means to an end though; pure development aid equalled with colonialism; to create peace it is not sufficient to merely think about it, people have to come together and talk about it; need for alternative tourism – money well invested in getting together.
Visit to a school: "We're from different continents, but inside we're the same."; "Why do starving people have to grow flowers to send them to Europe instead of growing food?"
Visit to an old people's home: most lasting (negative) impression on Adivasis; "we mustn't let this happen to our old people"
An observation from a German: "Adivasi men are such untypical men, so gentle and soft, they shared everything, tried the beer of others, touched each other completely naturally. Here we would ask ourselves whether they are gay."
Question of NGO-control: Are the Adivasis who are working for an NGO really in charge or the non-Adivasis?

What is important for Adivasi?

- A cattle farmer is asked by an Adivasi why he doesn't produce bio gas with his 400 cows.
- An Adivasi realises: To own one single cow in India is good fortune. To own 400 cows in Germany is an economic disaster.
- A T-shirt becomes a living memory. (Marcel Thekaekara 2001: 56)

An Adivasi question on why there is unemployment in Germany;
Visit to a milk cooperative in East Germany about to be closed due to competition from the West; Adivasi observation, "I get to keep my cow but it looks like none will be left here."
German farmer's astonishment to be told what to do with his cows (to produce bio gas) by people from the so-called "Third World"

Story of the T-Shirt: Chathi, a Paniya, insists on buying a T-shirt for 20DM; others try to dissuade him by saying you can get four T-shirts for that price in India; Subramani exasperated, "Let him get the T-shirt, otherwise he won't be happy. That's the Paniya in him."; then proceeds to tell the story of Nurit Bird-David's visit who was surprised that Paniya and Kattunayakan would buy jackfruit on credit at the local store when they could pick them a 10-min walk away in the forest. Her theory, according to him, was that gatherers don't relate cause to effect (need to check this), hence don't expect to have to pay for the jackfruit at the shop. Mari, the Indian observer, however, concludes that it isn't that simple and surmises that the reason Chathi insisted on buying the T-shirt in Germany was as a souvenir.
Visit to a council estate and ensuing discussion on what "home" means for the Adivasi? For them this includes the place of their ancestors, their relationship to their immediate surroundings and the countless joint activities in which many people from their community participate; old people sitting on verandas and chatting; question whether people on the council estate go home again to their villages after work
Adivasis raised awareness among Germans about own lack of knowledge about German minorities, e.g. the Sorbs in Saxony

How can there be silence and reflection at a Church Day with 100.000 visitors?
We give something.
We present our project.
We prepare together with the Adivasis.
[…]
We make ourselves known.
If there's going to be drumming, it's going to be our own, joint drum roll.
We prepare a small intellectual meal for the others:

- With simple, living, affectionate words we dig a fertilising water canal into the hearts of others.
- We dance words, sentences, questions, thoughts, religion, philosophy, music – melting into one danced reality.
- We take the time to accept praise. (Marcel Thekaekara 2001: 64)

Nobody remembers the speeches as such but the experience of having participated; being recognised by people who have seen the Adivasis in a Dutch documentary; some German impressions: the Adivasis' "deep connection to life"; "to be able to be so open-minded , not to harbour big secrets"; "Adivasis don't pursue individual power, that's their strength"; "they used symbols to express their most important message: we need a community spirit in order for human development to be"; "I liked the fact that nobody spoke in their name. This resonates with our belief that in development cooperation the people concerned should have the possibility to take care of themselves with dignity, not to be taken over by a (European) project."
"I was a little worried the dancing would turn out a bit too folkloristic, that the audience would only watch but not participate. But maybe I just wasn't used to shirtless men in long white wrap-around skirts [the mundu]."
Self-reflection and critical voices: Do the Adivasi live what many people are trying to achieve? Do we only do this kind of work for our own self-interest and the feel-good-factor? "Maybe the India Day of the Higher Education Centre lasted long enough for everyone to develop their enthusiasm but not long enough to realise we're maybe too different and don't go together?"
Eternal aspects of indigeneity that will always have currency: "We are people who have suffered and who were oppressed – but our spirit is unbroken. We get our strength from the roots of our society, our community spirit; through this we will become alive again, and be independent and free."
Occasional comparisons with and nostalgia for life in former East Germany: barter economy; people's warmth and friendliness; less emphasis on material things
About the Adivasis' perceptions of Germany: "They saw our society with clear eyes, the good and the bad, and weren't blinded by our affluence."; "They put their fingers on the sore spots in our society."

Has the trip changed them, the Adivasis?
Yes

- They experience new things.
- They learn about a new way of life.
- They experience a different way of dealing with time.
- They learn a lot about their German friends:

  Some leave their families and start their own families.
  Some start joint families they call communes.

Medically they look after their elders well but not emotionally.

- They would like many Germans to visit them so they can show them their way of life.

No

- They all want to continue to live in Gudalur.
- They want to achieve the reasonably necessary.
- They want to be and remain independent.
- They want to maintain and nurture the community.
- They want to protect their own values.

Adivasi observations about Germany upon their return to Gudalur:
"There are no small farms, only big ones. They are not dependent on agriculture. Their big farms may be economically better off. Many people told me that nobody wants to work in agriculture any more because there isn't enough money and free time. […] But who is going to produce food then?"
"Their standards of life are so high that they're unhappy if they fall."
"The people there saw us as people like them. Not simply as poor people, not as inferior."
On the question of desire for material things: "To see all these things is like a dream – can you get all the things that appear in your dreams?"
"I may be poor but I am independent. That's better than a comfortable life but to de dependent."
"I was astonished that there are people living on the streets in a country with such a rich and strong government. I thought, oh my goodness, this is another reason for us never to trust governments or others and to be dependent on them. We have to stand on our own feet. I am grateful for my own place, however it looks, however humble it may be. I can build a small hut in my village and live there in peace. Nobody will throw me out and I will never have to live on the street."
"I like their attitude towards food. They simply take what they have. If there's only bread, they eat that. At home we always have to cook rice with a little sambhar, otherwise we think this isn't a full meal."
"There society is divided according to age. The children are together, old people are together, but every group for itself. It's as if there is a corner for every age in this society."
"It's incredible that there are so many cars with only one passenger inside it. […] Every bus and train in India is overcrowded. How only one person can sit in a train and this huge train departs with only one passenger inside it is something unbelievable for us. Is it because time is so important?"
On donor-recipient relationships and building solidarity: "After we have seen how they raise their funds we realised that the people who give don't know who gets the money and we (the people who receive) don't know who we get it from. I think in future there should be a relationship between donors and recipients."; "The most astonishing thing is that some Germans who live in rented houses send us money for us to be able to build our own houses and that people without work do something for us in order for us to be able to maintain our own (economic) livelihoods."
"We've realised that many things we have are of great value. We never saw this as something special."

What do Adivasis want to change at home?

- They want to be treated as equals among equals.
- They want to be treated with the same dignity they treat people, animals, trees, water and the soil.
- Nobody should be afraid any more. (Marcel Thekaekara 2001: 89)

Equality
"For the first time in our lives everyone we met treated us as an equal, with respect."
After talking to German ministers they find it easier to deal with local Gudalur officials; increased awareness about social hierarchy in India: "even in the friendliness of Delhi officials is hidden a certain kind of patronising attitude, which is always present when rich and powerful people deal with poor people."
However, even in Germany inequality has tacitly been accepted as an integral part of society, a "necessary evil".
Their conviction that entire Adivasi society built on rock-solid foundation of equality because of their unconditional acceptance of all life forms, which does not only include humans and animals but also trees, water and the soil. Everything is dependent on each other.

Children
"Children don't seem to be integrated into families as here"; "It was strange to see hardly any children running around in the streets.";

On the strangeness of nappies (for Adivasis as well as most Indians) and not letting children run around naked, even in summer: "In Germany the children aren't free. Until they are two years old they have to wear nappies. It must be terrible for a child to have to sit around in its own shit. Our children can go behind a tree and only have to call someone to be washed."
Seeing a child as a child and not as an unfinished adult. Children take part in almost everything and mothers unselfconsciously breastfeed their children at meetings.

Homo ludens: on learning and playfulness
"The children here in Gudalur have to use their own imagination. […] They invent their own games. The German kids can't do that."
Adivasi knowledge is transmitted orally and all learning takes place in the forest, in the community or in the village.
Knowledge is like the land, air and water in Adivasi society – communal property – it belongs to everyone. There are no copyright or patents. On the contrary, a song is composed and sung about it – there is no better way than making a discovery public.
Discussion on so-called "endangered languages": oral cultures should be allowed to survive without being written down.

On sharing

- Sharing doesn't mean the letters of a word for Adivasi.
- They could not or hardly explain the word.
- Sharing consists of self-evident activities integrated into the daily rhythm.
- Am I even able to share if I don't own anything?
- No! No? I can only share what someone has just given me because of the pleasure of just having received something from nature or another person.
- Because nature or a person has just given me something that belongs to everyone.
- I am recipient and distributor.

Story of how Mullukurumba gave part of their quarry even to passersby; similar story of Paniya and honeycomb and Paniya children sharing one biscuit among six or seven friends; Adivasi contrast to our notion of sharing: for us sharing is connected to our concept of property. We share what we own. However, where everyone owns everything or everyone owns the same the "problem" of sharing doesn't arise. In this case sharing has nothing to do with the generosity of the giver but with the natural right of the receiver.

On time
"Adivasis don't fix the future. They are open for everything that comes along."
"Adivasis don't get nervous. They are delighted the delayed bus has given them the opportunity to have a conversation, to play a game or drink tea."
"If I always want to be on time, I can only be responsible for myself – for no one else."

Appendix 9 – Culture Centre documents

Culture Centre concept

ANOTHER PEOPLE.....

ANOTHER WAY OF LIFE.....

ANOTHER CIVILISATION.....

A Project to Allow Indigenous Culture to be Known

Background

For many years now we have been talking about the need of working on the cultural aspects of our communities. The first intervention was the cultural festival. It is important to note that we had the cultural festival even before the demonstration. And it has now become like an institution which takes place every year, with two exceptions. Some documentation work was done when Anita was here – out of which we have some outputs like "putheri", the songbook, some documentation which we did not publish etc. We also felt the need to develop a script for these oral languages and with that work we brought out a primer in Paniya. More recently we have felt the need to revive traditional systems of governance and in this context there is work being done on Kavus, mobilising the Karanavars and holding tribe-wise meetings. In the school the need for a curriculum on culture has been strongly felt and a number of activities have been taken up in the school to pass on cultural information and knowledge to the children. Surendiren who saw an aboriginal museum in Australia, and others who saw the slavery museum in Liverpool were all struck by this mode of capturing and communicating the history of a people. And apart from all this we have been very conscious of the Adivasi identity permeating through everything we do – though this has been more in a political context rather than a cultural one.

So culture has been very much part of what we do – but our interventions have all been rather fragmented and we have not tried to strategically plan and take a holistic view of this issue. This is now an area of some urgency as we see that perhaps because of our won success our people are now very much part of the dominant non-culture and this is impacting them in a variety of ways. The first visible sign is the change in clothing. But other cultural expressions are also changing – like weddings, even funerals. And more basically if we look at Mullukurumba villages we find them aping the chettan way of building houses on each person's land – thus perhaps weakening the village identity. These are just a few and all indications of the possibility of the tribal being eroded.

Why protect it? I think there is general agreement that cultural biodiversity is crucial. More than that some of us strongly feel that the Adivasi way of life, in terms of values, has so much to offer the modern world. We will fail in our duty if we do not do something to ensure that the Adivasis are conscious of their invaluable heritage and support them to find ways of somehow preserving it – not as something dead and ritualistic but as a dynamic and powerful framework within which they can take their communities forward.

At this crucial juncture there are a number of strands that are coming together: At the village level we are trying to strengthen the Adivasi identity and a series of activities and interventions have been planned. We want to communicate to the Adivasi themselves that they are part of something larger – there are people like them all over the world and so to take some pride in their cultural heritage in the face of derision – both overt and covert from non-tribals. We want to develop new methodologies to pass on traditional knowledge to the younger generation since now their education takes place within the school context and not with their parents in the village context.

It is against this background that we are proposing what has come to be called the "culture project". A brainstorming session with Ram, Rama, Mari and Stan re-emphasised the need for a coordinated and holistic approach to the whole issue of culture. Hence this write up.

Culture: Some thoughts
But before delving into what our strategies are or should be let us examine what we mean by culture a little more. There are some generalisations or possible categories into which any discussion on culture seems to fall.

Cultural expressions: this is the first thing people think about when we talk about culture. Clothes, language, music, dance, jewellery, artefacts, etc.

Cultural identity: less physical and more emotive. A sense of belonging to a particular group of people. What creates this sense of belonging is something that needs more exploration. It is an area where I think the animators feel that there is a strong identity – people definitely identify as Adivasis – there appears to be no immediate threat to this.

Cultural Rituals and religion: though on the wane there seems to be a revival thanks to some active work in the last few months. But in certain areas like marriage many changes are visible. Also in the kaavu and other rituals the influence of Hinduism may be increasing. On the other hand Christianity is also making inroads though slowly. A very difficult area of work and one fraught with dangers – the last thing we would want to see is some kind of fundamentalist thinking taking over. Rituals gaining paramount importance.

Governance: This is another area where a lot of change has already taken place. Traditional systems of governance have become weak and traditional leaders have been relegated to almost figure heads at times of Kaavu, Adiyantharam, marriages and funerals. They are no longer seen as leaders of the community – ones who command everyone's respect. Mari had documented the story of Manben of Theppakadu – perhaps one of the last of the traditional elders.

Knowledge and practices: Given their dependence on the natural environment it is now widely recognised that there is a body of knowledge that is referred to as "indigenous knowledge". Though many question whether this is actually knowledge or is it just practice rooted in tradition. Whatever the debate, we cannot deny that they "know" things – like honey gathering or medicinal plants - though this knowledge might not be scientifically codified and might also be incomplete and sometimes rooted in blind beliefs or what we may be tempted to call superstition.

Values: This last category is one that is often forgotten and perhaps the one most difficult to understand. What are the values that underpin a society? How do these values influence behaviour? In most societies these values are expressed as a sub-set of religion and do not tend to dominate all aspects of society. These values are put forward as desirables – something to strive for – invariably as individuals. The structure of society is not usually shaped by these values. It is in this area that Adivasi society is at variance with the rest of the world. Their value system has shaped every fibre of their society – it seems to determine everything, every aspect of life and behaviour. This is something I feel is very much under threat in today's world, and we, through our own well meaning interventions, have contributed to it.

The Purpose:
So what exactly is our purpose? Let us first say what it is not! The last thing we want to do is to go down the popular route of seeing them as exotic creatures who need to be preserved along with the tigers!! And therefore creating a dead museum of tribal artefacts and handicrafts etc. While a museum has a place it cannot be like the one at the Tribal Research Centre in Ooty.
There are innumerable studies of many kinds (mainly anthropological), films, etc about indigenous people all over the world. But somehow many of these are portrayed as stand alone pieces of history. What happened to the aboriginals of Australia is seen as something completely separately from what happened to the native Americans. What happened to the Adivasis in India, is seen as nothing to do with what happened to the indigenous people of South America. These are all seen as separate and distinct events that happened to different communities in different parts of the world and so their histories are written independent of each other. Though many parallels are drawn, there has been no attempt to portray them as a civilisation that was spread across the globe. And more importantly a civilisation that has managed to survive, though weakly, against incredible odds. At this point of history when no corner of the globe appears to be untouched, when technology can reach any and everywhere – it seems that these communities, scattered as they are, stand in danger of being overwhelmed by a dominant global economy and its attendant culture. This global monoculture rooted in a capital economy has all the trappings of a new civilisation - one based on values that are diametrically opposed to the civilisation of indigenous people across the world.

Hence the purpose of what we are trying to do can be summed up as:
"Creating a range of fora by which the Adivasi people of the Gudalur valley can understand that they are part of a larger civilisation and thus value, cherish and preserve their cultural ethos and identity. Through this fora reach out to various non-Adivasi communities so that they too are aware that there are alternate ways of living in the hope that they will develop a respect for the indigenous people's way of life".

Who is our audience?
Without a shadow of doubt our first circle by way of an audience are indigenous people themselves with a primary focus on the Adivasis here in Gudalur. Especially young people and children who are drawn unthinkingly like iron filings to a magnet by the dominant pressure and pull of non-tribal society in Gudalur. This audience has to realise that what they have is something other people are interested in as well, that other communities value – self worth is often estimated through how other people see us. Without creating this kind of a push from other non-tribal communities who are interested in and respect Adivasi culture it will be very difficult to resist the pull from the local non-tribal community. So the secondary circle will be non-tribal communities. These will fall into many sub-categories: the non-Adivasi of the area here, government (including legislative and judicial) officials, school and college students – first in Gudallur and then other areas, tourists to the Niligris, researchers and policy makers, donor and international aid agencies, the public at large. No lack of ambition!! But clearly we must begin with the inner circle of our primary audience – the Adivasis of Gudalur. This should be a catalytic process that will allow the Adivasis themselves to reach out to other audiences over time.

Where do we begin?
As mentioned earlier there are a number of strands concurrently working on this issue each with their own strategies. But the trigger that attempts to bring this all together into one

holistic approach is the fact that we now have two clear spaces to initiate this process. One physical – with the school moving into the ACCORD building – there is a fairly large space in the former waiting area and passage of the hospital, there is the big hall and upstairs there is a place to develop an audio visual room. This is a space where we can create a live interactive centre of indigenous culture.
The other space is not so physical – with Vidyodaya getting NIOS recognition we now have far more freedom to develop our own curriculum. Developing a "culture curriculum" has been very much on the agenda but we have not got it going in a truly systematic and structured manner. This is a good time to launch into this with determination. (Thekaekara 2009a)

Extract from a project report for the Ratan Tata Trust

Interactive Culture Centre – "Interactive Centre for Indigenous Cultures" (ICIC)

The interactive cultural centre for Adivasi/indigenous cultures is beginning to take shape in the school. Initially the objectives were vague but now that it has become clearer, work along the lines has begun.
*The following **stages** of content development are proposed:*
Adivasis in Gudalur/Nilgiris/Tamil Nadu Adivasis/tribes in the rest of India Indigenous peoples across the world.
The documentation of tribes in Gudalur, in the Nilgiris in detail is over. We haw been able to collect a large number of books and papers on the tribes in English. Some of these have to be translated into Tamil which is a major job on hand. We have also got together a lot of material on tribes on Tamil Nadu and India state-wise. There is also a lot of material that we have received from organizations like Survival International on tribes in other parts of the world. A video library is also available where both documentaries and feature films on tribes are shown. These are being screened at all opportunities.
However, the main programme has to do with the centre becoming an interactive one. Here one of our elders and dramatists Chathi from Cheenath village has taken the initiative and comes every Friday to teach Paniya songs, dances and drama to the children. He also answers questions about the life of his people. He has also been able to inspire two other elders to come to the school. They have also taught the children many songs and also to play musical instruments.
The next step is to list similar people in other tribes and get them to come here. Once we encourage them in this way to present themselves before children they will not find it difficult to do the same before strangers. It is important that they are able to interact without difficulty before strangers if the Centre has to work well. Once a few persons from each tribe are ready then we plan to make out a calendar of events and invite outside people to attend the centre. (Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust 2010)

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